

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



March 2016

Vol. 121, No. 3

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Reason versus Religion—XI

But those who are highly advanced do not care for such little helps, they have well-nigh forgotten all about this seeking things for themselves, wanting things for themselves. The predominant idea in them is—not I, but thou, my brother. Those are the fit persons to worship the Impersonal God. And what is the worship of the Impersonal God? No slavery there—‘O Lord, I am nothing, have mercy on me.’ You know the old Persian poem, translated into English: ‘I came to see my beloved. The doors were closed. I knocked and a voice came from inside. “Who art thou?” “I am so-and-so.” The door was not opened. A second time I came and knocked; I was asked the same question, and gave the same answer. The door was opened not. I came a third time, and the same question came. I answered, “I am thee, my love”, and the door opened.’ Worship of the Impersonal God is through truth. And what is truth? That I am He. When I say that I am not Thou, it is untrue. When I say I am separate from you it is a lie, a terrible lie. I am one with this universe, born one. It is self-evident to my senses that I am one with the universe. I am one with the air that surrounds me, one with heat, one with light, eternally one with the whole Universal Being, who is called this universe, who is mistaken for the universe, for it is He and nothing else, the eternal subject in the heart who says, ‘I am’, in every heart—the deathless one, the sleepless one, ever awake, the immortal, whose glory never dies, whose



powers never fail. I am one with That. This is all the worship of the Impersonal, and what is the result? The whole life of man will be changed. Strength, strength it is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery. It will make us strong. Then miseries will be laughed at, and the ferocious tiger will reveal, behind its tiger’s nature, my own Self. That will be the result. That soul is strong that has become one with the Lord; none else is strong. In your own Bible, what do you think was the cause of that strength of Jesus of Nazareth, that immense infinite strength which laughed at traitors, and blessed those that were willing to murder him? It was that, ‘I and my Father are one’; it was that prayer, ‘Father, just as I am one with you, so make them all one with me.’ That is the worship of the Impersonal God. Be one with the universe, be one with Him.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.390-91.



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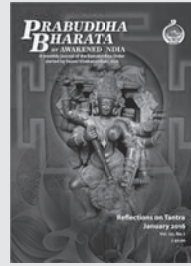
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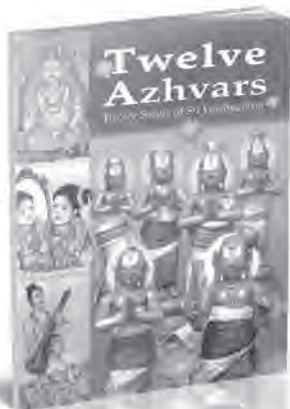
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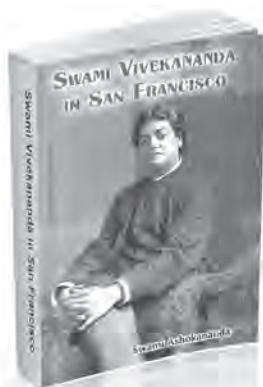


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Maitrayaniya Upanishad

March 2016
Vol. 121, No. 3

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं यः कर्ता सोऽयं वै भूतात्मा करणैः कारयितान्तः पुरुषः । अथ यथाग्निनाऽयस्मिण्डो
वाभिभूतः कर्तृभिर्हन्यमानो नानात्वमुपैत्येवं वाव खल्वसौ भूतात्मान्तःपुरुषेणाभिभूतो गुणैर्हन्यमानो
नानात्वमुपैति । चतुर्जालं चतुर्दशविधं चतुरशीतिधा परिणतं भूतगणमेतद्वै नानात्वस्य रूपं । तानि ह वा
एतानि गुणानि पुरुषेणेरितानि चक्रमिव मृत्यवेनेति । अथ यथाऽयस्मिण्डे हन्यमाने नाग्निरभिभूयत्येवं
नाभिभूयत्यसौ पुरुषोऽभिभूयत्ययं भूतात्मोपसंश्लिष्टत्वादिति ॥३.३॥

*Athanyatrapyuktam yah karta so'yam vai bhutatma karanaih karayitantah purushah. Atha
yathagnina'yaspindo vabhibbutah kartribhir-hanyamano nanatvam-upaityevam vava khalvasau
bhutatmantah purushenabhibbhuto gunair-hanyamano nanatvamupaiti. Chaturjalam
chaturdashavidham chaturashitidha parinatam bhutaganametadvai nanatvasya rupam.
Tani ha va etani gunani purusheneritani chakramiva mrityaveneti. Atha yatha'yaspinde
hanyamane nagnir-abhibbhuyatyevam nabhibbhuyatyasau purusho'bhibbhuyatyayam
bhutatmopasamslishtatvaditi* (3.3)

‘And it has been said elsewhere also: “Indeed, one who is the doer is also the elemental soul. One who causes actions through the organs is the inner person. Now, just as a lump of iron takes many forms being overcome by fire and beaten by workers, so, of course, indeed, the elemental soul takes many forms overcome by the inner person and beaten by qualities. Indeed, the mode of that form has fourfold covering, is fourteen-fold, is transformed in eighty-four different ways, is a host of beings. Indeed, these varieties are impelled by the person just as the wheel is impelled by the potter. Now, just as when a lump of iron is beaten, the fire is not overcome, so, the person is not overcome. The elemental soul is overcome due to attachment to qualities.”’ (3.3)

THIS MONTH

OUR LIFE IS AN UNENDING tug-of-war caught up in the pulls of dual extremes of ignorance: good and evil, love and hatred, attachment and aversion, and so on. Most often we lose our ideals and deflect from our goals because of the pitfalls that this constant fight brings. No material pursuit, not to talk of spiritual exercises, is possible if the influence of these pulls is not managed. **Transcending Dualities** explores the need for and ways of controlling these twin troubles.

Incarnations guide the ordinary by aligning their lives on the eternal principles of truth. It is only natural with them as they are established in the ultimate reality or truth. Sri Ramakrishna's life could be considered a new scripture by itself that is a guide to all spiritual aspirants. This is portrayed in the first instalment of **Sri Ramakrishna: Scriptures Embodied** by Swami Kriarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math.

Ranjit Kumar Barman, Assistant Professor in the department of philosophy, Sukanta Mahavidyalaya, Dhupguri, West Bengal, does **An Examination of the Concept of Dharma**.

Alok Dutta, a litterateur, artist, and social activist from Kolkata takes a fresh look at the diverse aspects of the architect-god, **Vishvakarma**.

In **The Birds of Sri Ramakrishna: Swan**, Dr Suruchi Pande, vice chairperson, Ela Foundation, Pune and head, department of ethno-ornithology, MES Garware College, Pune, explores the contexts in which Sri Ramakrishna talked of the swan and also gives some ornithological information.

Turiya or the fourth state of consciousness is described in the second instalment of the edited transcription of a series of lectures on **Mandukya Upanishad** given by Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, who was the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

The sublimity of *Ramanama-sankirtana* and the futility of lecturing and dabbling in words in spiritual life are pointed out in the second instalment of Swami Omkareshwarananda's recounting of **Swami Premananda's Teachings**. This has been translated from the Bengali book *Premananda*.

The human need for fulfilment is discussed in the second instalment of **The Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Life** by Swami Nityasthananda, acharya at the Probationers' Training Centre, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

In the twentieth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi of Gangadharendra Sarasvati—Attaining Self-dominion**, the Buddhist standpoint is quashed. This text has been translated and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda, editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

The story of **The Godly Mother Madalasa** is featured in this month's *Traditional Tales*. This story has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Susan Blackmore, a British parapsychologist, lecturer, and a writer on psychology held **Conversations on Consciousness** with various experts in the field. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

Transcending Dualities

WE WANT TO BE HAPPY but our sorrows do not let us be so. We want to love people but our love is constantly clouded by unremitting hatred. We want to go ahead on our path to achieve greatness but the pulls of our body and mind do not let us do things in peace. We are constantly tossed and turned by the pulls of dualities. These twin-troubles come from our body, mind, and the environment. At their root lies our inherent nature to see things in pairs of opposites. This is similar to the traffic lights: red means stop; green means go. The amber light for waiting is not so much an intrinsic trait of human beings. Perception is ignorance. At least ordinary perception is. In the realm of ignorance all perception is wrong and leads us away from knowledge. True perception is the immediate perception that is achieved without the senses as opposed to the mediate perception achieved through the senses. Immediate perception can be only of an indivisible, infinite, non-dual reality. The way to attain an immediate perception of this reality is to go beyond the realm of ignorance. This can be done by constantly reminding oneself of the ultimate reality or negating the apparent permanence of the evanescent experiences of dual nature.

Detachment is the key to negating the illusory events of the universe. This detachment has to be at the levels of the body, mind, and body-mind interactions with the environment. When the mind is detached its detachment percolates to the body and all interactions with external stimuli. The human body is engineered to

endure. That is the reason why when millions have not much to protect their body with, some privileged few worry about the extra lining absent in their apparel. It is also why when countless are satiated by stale and tasteless food, a few toss a meal where the seasoning is inadequate.

Comparison brings confusion. Only by an experiential understanding of the futility of all external experiences is one convinced of the need to analyse oneself subjectively.


The human brain is programmed to think in discrete sets. There are two aspects on either side of a yardstick. The line of the desired outcome has only two possibilities, that the outcome is fulfilled or that it is not. So, in all temporal constructions of the mind, there are distinct divisions such as light and darkness. The primate past of the human beings had to heavily rely upon this trait of objectifying sensory data in pairs. Whether an animal could be hunted or not was fast communicated in binary form: a mere shake of the head in the appropriate direction sufficed. In essence human evolution has kept this method of communication; only the form has changed from a nod to the digital pathway of the present-day world. Still, we humans definitely rely on binary data. So, there lies the problem intrinsic to the psychological and neurological make-up of the human being. We are stuck with dualities. The only way out seems to be the realisation that all that we see in this universe is unreal, no matter how we see it, whether binary or otherwise.

Why is it so important to transcend dualities? It could be well argued that these dualities are what give the human life an edge over other beings and create the totality of a sublime expression. While that may be the apparent, the cause of all suffering is our overly intense preoccupation with duality. For instance, if we consider a line to be our ideal that has to be achieved, the moment we reach this line, we are immediately aware of a bigger line, a higher ideal. That is why it is impossible to attain fulfilment in the domain of dualities. Hence, whatever we may attain in the life of sense-experience, there would always be something better yet to be attained. This is the root cause of misery. It is imperative that we transcend dualities if we wish to transcend misery. For a blissful state to be attained, the bliss should not be dependent on anything.

A practical method of setting oneself on the path of transcending dualities would be to constantly analyse every aspect of one's experience and try to find the cause of such experience within oneself. While doing so, one should also remind oneself that these experiences are all illusory and have to be undergone only till the ultimate truth is known. For instance, if one gets angry, instead of blaming a person, object, or a living being for that fit of anger, if one could see oneself as responsible, it would be easy to control anger and eventually go beyond it. This exercise could be done with all other experiences. It definitely is the subject who is responsible for any experience. Else, why is it that different people have different responses to the same external stimulus? The difference is in the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual maturity of the subject. Solutions to all our problems are not to be found in the rectification of the external environment but in the conviction that no change can be brought from without but only from within.

The human mind is capable of destroying itself by meditation on the ultimate reality much like a self-destruct computer program. It is up to us to harness this unique potential of the human mind and put an end to all suffering.

Logic and reasoning are great stumbling blocks to all efforts to transcend dualities. While they are highly useful in removing unnecessary mental clutter, they bind one in the straitjacketed cage of patterns and structures that are characteristic of all creations of time, space, and causation. The secret is to clean the mind of rubbish and focus it on something that is beyond logic, something that is inexplicable. Since the ultimate reality fogged by ignorance brings about the phenomenal universe, all cause and effect relationships are within the realm of this ignorance. It is the reason why many faith-traditions insist on breaking systemic thought-patterns and ask to meditate on apparently meaningless sounds and syllables.

Transcending dualities cannot be a sensory experience. It has to be beyond the mind too. Comparison brings confusion. By an experiential understanding of the futility of all external experiences, one is convinced of the need to analyse oneself subjectively. Problems of life only aggravate as long as they are seen as caused by external factors. Subjectifying a problem not only puts it in perspective but it also takes one closer to the understanding of the essential non-dual nature of the universe. All separation causes suffering. If there is nothing or none to be loved, hated, feared, conquered, and to exert upon the countless other dual manifestations of the human mind, then there would be no suffering. In reality, there is truly nothing or none separate from one; there is only the one non-dual reality. What is needed is the understanding of this truth. And only such understanding can lead one away from all suffering and misery. 

Sri Ramakrishna: Scriptures Embodied

Swami Kritarthananda

IN SPEAKING TO THE WESTERN audience, Swami Vivekananda had said on several occasions that everything a true Hindu does—right from birth till the last breath—is in accordance with the scriptural injunction. In fact a true Hindu's life is moulded after the pattern laid down by the scriptures.

Great souls descend on Indian soil from time to time to prove the veracity of such statements in their lives. Their exemplary lives act as a beacon light to the weak-minded humanity, and inspire them to live in conformity with the scriptures, thereby making their goal of life, namely God-realisation, meaningful.

More so is the case with the great souls called avatars. Buddha, Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Acharya Shankara, Ramanuja, and Sri Chaitanya were a few of such avatars who were born with superhuman qualities of head and heart. They all learnt the wisdom inherent in the scriptures from their very childhood. Besides, they had many more dazzling glories and through their personalities made them unique in many respects.

Education in Nature's School

Sri Ramakrishna was born in a devout and learned yet humble and steadfast brahmana family, and was endowed with a few prominent traits that acted as strong shields in protecting his life from many odds and leading him smoothly towards the goal of human life. In the first place, he had a passion for truth, a desire to experience truth from various revelations of the 'open

book of nature'. So he started this adventurous journey towards truth by happily agreeing to go to school with many other friends of his village. He was always in a playful mood with them, yet with a little distinction. Unlike others, he had a unique penetrative gaze which could judge things in depth with an unbiased mind by diving through the obstructive covering. It is the first weapon necessary to storm the gate of spiritual mansion. So even amidst his play he discovered that the great scholars had their minds fixed on mere bread-earning education instead of acquiring the knowledge of the Immutable one.¹

Learning his mathematics lessons on addition was acceptable to the boy Gadadhar, the given name of Sri Ramakrishna. But the problem came in the case of subtraction. His question was: how could anything be taken away from another? Isn't everything pervaded by God? So if you reduce something from another, where can the remainder be kept? The scholarly teachers found such questions too much to answer; it was beyond the pale of their knowledge. So Gadadhar's learning ended up in merely enjoying the company of friends. In his eyes all those complicated problems of accounts were meant to enrich material prosperity, which he disliked since childhood. Hence his education could not cross the threshold of the village school because of his refusal to seek money from scholarship.

Again, with the same analytical eyes he could conclude that God had a laugh when two brothers quarrelled over the possession of a land

and divided it into two with a rope, claiming one side for each. Probably both of them could die the very next day of unknown causes. Little Gadadhar could see the terrible joke of God. He could also see God laughing when a doctor falsely assures the relatives of a dying person of being able to bring that person back to life, knowing fully well that the latter's lifespan was over. God again gave a hearty but silent laugh from behind the curtain but within Gadadhar's gaze. Gadadhar realised the limitations of human capacity.²

These are a few specks from the *open book of nature* that made little Gadadhar wise even without formal schooling and without memorising the lessons. Mother Nature is so gracious that she goes on revealing herself every moment to the keen and unbiased observer. Nature even communicates in her own language and sign, which can only be perceived by an open heart. This is a kind of revelation of the immanent God through the truths of nature. Happily enough, this power of unbiased and neutral observation is also an indispensable prerequisite in the path of science.

Another rare quality Gadadhar possessed was to hold firmly the wisdom perceived long ago. This capacity is called *medha*. It does not mean merely a photographic memory, as is held by many. When a student absorbs something into one's system with all love, confidence, and *shraddha*, it makes an indelible impression in the student's personality and comes out spontaneously in times of crises, as if to protect one from all odds like an affectionate mother. Gadadhar's observations were so keen and carried in their trail such a strong will to do good to all that even those very events which aroused adverse reactions in ordinary minds would reveal to him something unique and special about God. A few illustrations will clarify the statement. In later years, once a devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna

how to fix the mind on God. The latter at once saw down the memory lane a sight of the marketplace at Kamarpukur. Two women-vendors were busy in a roadside shanty husking rice from paddy by means of a locally made contraption of a pounding stone moving in and out of a shallow pit by means of a lever system run manually by one of them while the other was checking and removing the husked rice and pushing in a fresh lot for husking; simultaneously she was carrying on conversations with the buyer and attending to various needs, at the same time breastfeeding her child. All the while her careful gaze was on the pounding stone which fell on the husking rice in quick succession. Sri Ramakrishna spoke of *abhyasa-yoga* or the yoga of constant practice to the questioner by narrating this incident (367). When he was taken to see the Calcutta Circus he saw a young girl standing on one leg on a running horse. That reminded him of intense spiritual practice which leads to perfection. And even when his horse carriage was clopping past the grog shop wherein a few tipsy people were revelling in a spell of intoxication, Sri Ramakrishna pushed his neck out of the carriage window and cheered them up in a loud voice. The sight had actually reminded him of the joy of God-intoxication! This is another unique power of *medha*—to convert even commonplace, profane experiences into divine memory spontaneously.

The Illiterate Scholar

We have just seen that Sri Ramakrishna did not continue his study in school, not to speak of having scriptural knowledge. Then how could he mould his life according to scriptural injunctions? This is a strange phenomenon found in his life story. It was not that he followed scriptures, but on the other hand, the *scriptures followed him*. It all started even as he was a little boy. Dhani, a woman of blacksmith caste, became the

midwife at the time of little Gadadhar's birth. It was she who became his second mother. Once when left alone with Gadadhar, she extracted from the little one a promise that he would beg his first alms from her at the time of investiture with the sacred thread. And poor that she was, she started saving money bit by bit from that day, trusting that little boy's candid promise. It was a historic event that ever happened in the Indian history that a brahmana boy begged his first alms from a low-caste blacksmith woman. Was it a mere childish prank of a simple boy to violate the age-old custom? The general answer of the majority would be, to hold on to truth, that is, the promise he made earlier. Right, but that is not the only answer. The renowned lawmaker Manu gave an injunction in his Smriti: 'A Brahmin boy may beg his first alms after investiture ceremony from his mother, sister, aunt, or one *who gives full dignity to him*.'³ But how did Gadadhar know all that at that tender age? One has no answer to this question except that scriptures follow him who is the real pandit. Now, what is the true meaning of the word 'pandit'? Let us refer to the greatest commentator of the eighth century, Shankara. He clearly comments in his commentary on the Bhagavadgita that only one who has *panda*, that is, a clear knowledge, of the Atman, is fit to be called a pandit.⁴ He further explained this term in his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: 'Being a pandit means knowing the Atman in a special way.'⁵ Hence, judging by this standard laid down by our commentators, can we not call Sri Ramakrishna a pandit in the real sense of the term? Of course, when living in the mortal form, he himself never liked to hear such appellations about himself.

Almost all children below the age of ten are seen to be frolicsome, playful, and pranksters. Gadadhar was no exception. His mischievous behaviour in the company of his friends and his

playful mimicry of the pandits in an assembly threw even elders into side-splitting laughter. Yet he had a distinction that made him stand head and shoulders above all his mates. He was not merely a keen observer but a keen listener too. Whereas his friends got themselves lost in the amusement of various funs, he would have a part of his receptive mind fixed on the discussions and disputes raised by the assembled scholars. It is said that in one such assembly of scholars when a debate was going on with a certain issue and nobody was able to come to any decisive conclusion, Gadadhar whispered to one of the participant scholars that the dispute could possibly be settled on such and such lines. The scholar was amazed and announced Gadadhar's solution to the rest of the members to their astonishment and cheer.

The Sanskrit phrase *balya*-bhava is commonly interpreted as a childish attitude or prank. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, however, the word '*balya*' means strength of spiritual knowledge. The Upanishad says: 'The knower of Brahman, having known all about scholarship, should try to live upon that strength which comes from knowledge.'⁶ It is this strength of knowledge that compelled the child Gadadhar to give his verdict to settle the dispute among the scholars. It is, again, the same strength which opened the gate of knowledge even to his guru Totapuri by freeing the latter of his age-old superstition. Acharya Shankara has elaborated on the meaning of the word '*bala*' in the aforesaid context: 'Strength is the complete elimination of the vision of the objective world by Self-knowledge.'⁷ What does Self-knowledge do? It merges the objective world into the divine. Sri Ramakrishna meant this when he commented: 'Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.'⁸ He never looked upon the

phenomenal world as anything other than God. In his eyes even prostitutes were veritable representations of the Divine Mother; the drunkards' noisy revelry seemed to him as born of the bliss of God. He could not see anything apart from that. Even the lower states of enjoyment were nothing but a speck of that bliss of God in his eyes. This has also been spoken of in the Upanishads.⁹ But Sri Ramakrishna knew and saw this truth from direct, *aparoksha*, realisation, and not from scriptural study. This is why he was a real pandit, even without studying scriptures; no, more than that, he became the very embodiment of scriptures.

Sri Ramakrishna evinced another childlike trait, which has been explained by Acharya Shankara in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* under the same context just discussed. Therein the Acharya refuted the opposition's doubt by saying that in the case of a monk of realisation the word *balya* does not mean a freaky or wayward nature of a child but that a monk who is a knower of Brahman often behaves like a child who, owing to immature sense organs, never tries to display one's knowledge, wisdom, or spirituality to others and keeps himself free from all vanity and ostentation.¹⁰ Those who are acquainted with the life of Sri Ramakrishna know only too well how his behaviour fitted into such scriptural definition of *balya*-bhava.

Rani Rasmani, the founder of the Dakshineswar temple, had made such a provision of charity that no beggar, saint, or scholar would go away empty-handed from the temple precincts. Naturally it became a haven for all pilgrims irrespective of caste, creed, or sect. Even scholars of various denominations would spend a few days at Rasmani's temple precincts on their way to pilgrimage, discussing various scriptural topics. And Sri Ramakrishna, then in the prime of youth, would best utilise this opportunity

with his keen and receptive mind. Occasionally, there would be even discussions on the higher states of realisation of saints and like an attentive and interested student he would compare notes with his own realisations and ecstasies. This is one of the most important steps on the path of education, indispensable for every student, namely, to relate the newly received lesson or knowledge to one's own life-experiences. Unfortunately, this important part of education is being badly neglected by most educational authorities nowadays.

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. See *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.5.
2. See M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 323-4.
3. *Manusmriti*, 2.50: '*Mataram va svasaram va maturva bhaginim nijam/bhiksheta bhiksham prathamam ya chainam navamanayet*.' Emphasis added.
4. See Acharya Shankara's commentary on the Gita, 2.11: '*Panda atmavishaya buddhir-yesham te hi panditah*.'
5. Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.5.1: '*Etad atma-vijnanam pandityam*.'
6. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.5.1: '*Tasmad brahmanah pandityam nirvidya balyena tishtaset*.'
7. Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.5.1: '*Balam nama atma-vidyaya ashesha-vishaya-drishti-tiraskaranam*.'
8. *Gospel*, 260.
9. See the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.32: '*Etasyaiva-anandasya-anyani bhutani matram upajivanti*;' on a particle of this very bliss other beings live.'
10. See Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, 3.4.50: '*Antaro bhavavishesho balasya aprarudhendriyatvadih iha balyam-ashriyate. ... Jnanadhyayana-dharmikatvadibhih atmanam avikhyapayan dambhadarpa-padi-rahito bhavet. Yatha balah aprarudhendriyataya na paresham atmanam avishkartum ihate, tadvad*.'

An Examination of the Concept of Dharma

Ranjit Kumar Barman

THE VARIOUS MEANINGS OF the Sanskrit word 'dharma' include rituals dedicated to a deity, customs, or the essential character of an object. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his article '*Dharmatattva*' has mentioned six meanings of this word.¹ This paper attempts to critically evaluate the word 'dharma' and to examine its relevance today. A careful examination of its meaning through traditional texts reveals that it primarily meant morality on which its other meanings are centered. This meaning of dharma is relevant today for countering religious violence.

The role of religion is very important in the history of the evolution of human thought and religion has been central to human life. Following Max Muller we could say that 'the true history of humankind is the history of its religion.'² Religion has brought well-being in society. However, it has also been one of the major causes for many conflicts. In the name of religion, humanity has witnessed riots, wars, murders, bloodshed, oppression and assault of women, burning of houses, and destruction of places of worship.

Misconceptions Causing Havoc

Misconceptions about dharma cause rift and mistrust among humans. One does not usually tolerate someone belonging to a different sect or religion. This situation is not new as history is witness to countless killings guised as religious crusades over the ages. Dividing nations on the basis of religion is a sad reality.³

There are many religions because people have

different tastes. Religious diversity sometimes incites violence. But we can find concord among different religions. When one is in danger or is sinking, should we ask that person's religion? Should we decide what to do after knowing that person's religion? A sense of humanity and empathy prevents us from seeing that person's religion in such a scenario. Kazi Nazrul Islam says that when a person is in danger, we should not ask whether that person is a Hindu or a Muslim. When someone is sinking we should consider them as our sibling.⁴ All religions teach us only to serve humankind. The apparent contradictions between religions are superimposed by humans based on certain cultural and national preconceptions. Different contexts lead one to have a different notion of 'I'. Different religions are different paths of finding the ultimate truth. Accordingly, we should strive to realise the truth and serve others ignoring the different practices and beliefs of various religions.

It is noteworthy that although the word 'dharma' is translated into English as 'religion', these two do not convey the same meaning. Religion is usually considered to be some common beliefs shared by a group of people. The English word 'religion' is derived from the Middle English word '*religioun*' which came from the Old French 'religion'. It may have been originally derived from the Latin word '*religo*' which means, among other things, 'good faith' and 'ritual'. Or it may have come from the Latin word '*religare*' which means 'to tie fast'.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

defines religion as 'the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader; one of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular god or gods, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader.'⁵ The *Collins English Dictionary* defines religion as 'belief in, worship of, or obedience to a supernatural power or powers considered to be divine or to have control of human destiny; any formal or institutionalized expression of such belief.'⁶ When used in the sense of the characteristics of anything, the Sanskrit word 'dharma' could be used in sentences such as 'the dharma of water is to quench thirst' or 'the dharma of fire is to burn'. The broadness of the meanings of the word 'dharma' and the narrow meaning of the word 'religion' can be understood clearly if we substitute 'religion' for 'dharma' in the above sentences. They would ridiculously read as 'the religion of water is to quench thirst' and 'the religion of fire is to burn'!

The Sanskrit word 'dharma' is derived from the root *dhri*, which means 'to uphold'. Hence, the derivative meaning of 'dharma' is 'that which sustains or upholds'. In the case of an object, its essential property upholds it and hence is its dharma. This meaning of dharma is generally not understood and it is mistaken to be some practices or rituals. Thus, it is imperative that we understand the correct meaning of 'dharma' from ancient texts.

What is Dharma?

Human beings are different from animals in various ways. Ancient texts hold that without dharma human beings are identical to animals if they concentrate only on food, sleep, preservation, and procreation.⁷ What is dharma? Is it just a set of rituals? The purpose of rituals is to give some offerings to gods. Through such

rituals one attains devotion to God and also purifies the mind.

If God is one and our aim is to realise God, then it does not matter what path we follow. There is no cause of conflict among different religions simply because of prayer in different languages or different methods of worship—all these are offered to God. If one fails to discover the unity among different religions and thinks that one's path alone is true, such a person is in the preliminary stage, and the heart is yet to expand and such a person is yet to realise the ultimate truth.


The Sanskrit maxim, '*trinarani mani nyaya*' says that fire irrespective of whether it is produced from grass, wood, or a gem, has the utility of fire. Similarly, the aim of religion is to realise God irrespective of the path followed. In many verses of the Bhagavadgita, the word 'dharma' is taken to mean morality.⁸ It is also used in the sense of doing one's duties, which would save one from grave danger (2.40). 'Dharma' has been used in the sense of virtue in the Bhagavata.⁹ In the Mahabharata friendliness towards all beings is considered dharma.¹⁰ The Mahabharata equates dharma with justice (7.89.47). Dharma is also taken to mean forgiveness and steadfastness (4.6.20). The *Manusmriti* defines dharma as 'non-violence, truth, non-stealing, cleanliness, and equanimity'.¹¹ 'Without purity no true worship is possible. Unless an individual is pure in body and mind, his coming into a temple and worshipping the Deity are meaningless.'¹² The followers of Mimamsa consider dharma to be 'that which is indicated by the injunctions of the Vedas'.¹³ From these texts, we can safely conclude that 'dharma' is the good practised by a pure person. It follows that morality is the bedrock of spirituality. The same idea is present in the *Pancha-mahavrata* of Jainism and *Pancha-shila* of Buddhism.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have shown that various religions are but different paths to God. Sri Ramakrishna held that God-realisation was the ultimate aim of human life. Swami Vivekananda taught that we should strive to manifest the divinity inherent in us. He said:

This is the message of Shri Ramakrishna to the modern world: 'Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.'¹⁴

The universal religion envisaged by Swamiji is open to all irrespective of caste, creed, nationality, and gender. About different religions, he said: 'I believe that they are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. ... My idea, therefore, is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind' (2.365–6).

If dharma is construed as morality then religious conflict would end. No religion can claim superiority over others. Hence, it is best that morality is considered dharma. All rituals and beliefs should be secondary to that. Almost all religious clashes are due to differences in observances. Swamiji believed that one could attain

God by service of fellow beings seeing God in them. Therefore, based on morality and a spirit of spiritual service all religions can come together. This could be an idea for an universal religion that does not see differences but only the underlying unity of all faith-systems. 

Notes and References

1. These six meanings are: Religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam; morality; piety; rituals; essential characteristics of a thing; and social customs. See Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Dharmatattva' in *Bankim Rachanavali*, 3 vols (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 1361 BE), 2.672.
2. D Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: George H Doran, 1929), 9.
3. See Aravinda Basu and Nivedita Chakrabarti, *Dharmadarshan* (Bengali) (Kolkata: Firma K L M, 2007), 5.
4. See 'Kandari Hushiar' in Kazi Nazrul Islam, *Sanchita* (Kolkata: D M Library, 1928), 60.
5. <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/learner/religion>> accessed 15 January 2016.
6. <<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/religion>> accessed 15 January 2016.
7. 'Ahara nidra bhaya maithunancha samanyametat pashubhir naranam, dharma hi tesham-adhika vishesha dharmena hinah pashubhih samanah; food, sleep, fear, and procreation are same among humans and animals, dharma is special only to humans; without dharma the humans are akin to animals.' (Mahabharata, *Shantiparva*, 294.29).
8. See Gita, 1.1 and 4.7
9. See Bhagavata, 1.1.2.
10. See Mahabharata, *Shantiparva*, 261.59.
11. *Manusmriti*, 10.63.
12. Ranjit Kumar Barman, 'An Indian Outlook to the Concept of Dharma: In the Need of the Present Day', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4/5 (August–September 2015), 59–70; 64 <<http://tinyurl.com/zv5fxhv>> accessed 26 January 2016.
13. *Mimamsa Sutra*, 1.1.2.
14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.187.



Statue of Vishvakarma, Sun Temple, Modhera, Gujarat

WE KNOW VISHVAKARMA to be the god of technology but something is not quite clear: Is he the creator or the maker? This perceptible and non-perceptible universe is at the same time huge and tiny beyond imagination, is far and wide as much as the human mind can project and even beyond that—in what part of this universe is Vishvakarma present and where is he not? Are we limiting him because of the limitations of our thought?

The earth is just a very small part of the universe. Is Vishvakarma a patented god of a particular religion and location on earth? Can we limit him within the bounds of space and time? Is he worker himself or is he the god of all workers or is he the god of all, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion? Or is he the god of all human

Vishvakarma

Alok Dutta

beings? Is he the god of all animals, birds, and insects that indulge in different activities of building or creating?

Is Vishvakarma a male or is Vishvakarma also a female? And if Vishvakarma is not a female, then why do women have some abilities that men do not possess? Some works of art appear living but only a woman can give birth to life. And that life has a mind, intellect, wisdom, enjoyment, desires, and so many other things. That life can write poems, be happy, lose heart, love, imagine, and also transcend imagination. That life can keep alive the universe or the life-force of the universe and can also give birth to Vishvakarma himself. If all these can be accomplished by a woman, then definitely Vishvakarma should be present in a woman too.

Contemplating on Vishvakarma has made us contemplate many things. How much of the sense-world or external universe—where everything has its origin in creation—is within the jurisdiction of Vishvakarma and how much is beyond his grasp? Is he just a god of industry or is he a god of the arts? Is he the only god of all production or is he also the god of the subtlest surprise?

Both science and philosophy are convinced about the identity of the micro and the macro. Sometimes the collective of the micro is the macro and sometimes macro is the extension of the action of the micro. Before entering into this discussion, let me recount an incident about the micro and the macro. This incident had shaken me up and has kindled a thought-current that

is active in my mind even now. A village boy, Kamalkumar Biswas was my bosom friend, even though older than me. We used to talk on random subjects. We would discuss petty and serious things alike. There was no end to our curiosity. One day, he told me about a curiosity of his that had lingered from his childhood. A question had cropped up in his mind when he was in the primary school. He had asked the teacher: 'Sir, the sky has the sun, the moon, and countless celestial bodies and stars. How far from us they are! However big or bright they may be, we are able to see them through our small eyes. If we close only these two parts of our body, we are enveloped in darkness. How is it possible to see up to such a distance with our small eyes?' The teacher pondered this question for a long time. Then he said: 'I do not know the correct answer to your question. But I am delighted to see that a student of the fourth grade has come up with such a question. I am also proud that you are my student.'

I too am proud. All of us are proud. This curiosity of Kamal and the entire humanity has led to the birth of philosophy, science, and countless creations.

Yes, the eyes are small in size. Even in the eyes, only a tiny part helps us to see. It is with the help of the optic nerve and many other sensory mechanisms of the human body that we are able to see. These mechanisms enable the visual image to be conveyed to the brain and a meaningful perception derived out of it. When one thinks of the entire process, one understands that seeing is no ordinary thing. Hence, though small, the work of the eyes is indeed very big.

How much smaller will be the eyes of tiny creatures like the ant or creatures that are tinier than them! How small but how useful and surprisingly productive is this instrument, the eye! Who created this eye? Whoever it is, that

person is definitely a great worker! That person could have been called 'Mahakarma'. But the word 'Vishva' is comparatively more humane without losing the sense of the divine. Any term that has the word 'world' in it acquires a new dimension. And all appellations having the word 'world' denote that a person is the best of the human race. Further, God has been also called 'the lord of the world'.

The word 'doer' means one who performs an action or one who is capable of performing actions. So, the word 'Vishvakarma' means the best doer in the world. All creations of Vishvakarma are closely connected with the human civilisation. Human beings create a civilisation. And the main causes of creating a civilisation are the human ideas of utility and aesthetics. It is necessary to survive and it is better to survive in a beautiful environment. This attitude is at the core of aesthetics. Those who want to survive need an inhabitable home to protect them from heat, cold, and rain, and other unfavourable circumstances like wild animals or enemy attacks. According to anthropologists the Cro-Magnons, the species before *homo sapiens sapiens*, the present-day human beings, lived forty thousand years ago. The *homo sapiens* evolved about twenty lakh years ago. The need for survival and aesthetics was felt both by the Cro-Magnons and the *homo sapiens* and they endeavoured to achieve them. When living in trees, they either created treehouses or carved out convenient homes in caves. In everything was creation; in everything was Vishvakarma. And about ten thousand years ago, human beings developed cities. The hands that built all these can be called by a single name: aesthetics.

The human brain is larger than all these. This brain also has two hands; one is called science and the other technology. Human beings farm to appease their hunger. Science asks them

to cook the food thus produced. Technology equips the human beings with the tools and techniques necessary to do farming and cooking. And aesthetics adds taste and smell to food. Humans clothe themselves according to the climate to protect themselves from the summer heat, winter cold, and the humidity of the rainy season. Science teaches humans from what and how to make these clothes. Technology gives them machines to create yarn out of cotton, looms to create cloth out of yarn, and sewing machines and other tools to create apparel out of cloth. Aesthetics fills these clothes with colours, draws on them intricate patterns of flowers, petals, and leaves; and gives them a stylish identity, a smart name. The human being finds it necessary to have shelter and security for the night. Science teaches us how to construct a house with four walls and a roof. It teaches the utility of doors, windows, ventilators, kitchen, store room, bedroom, bolts, locks, beds, cupboards, chair, table, and other things. Technology teaches the art of using bricks, lime, sand, cement, mortar, iron, and wood. Aesthetics provides the design of the house and the colours of paints on the walls, doors, and windows.

Utility, aesthetics, science, and technology—these four are the different aspects of Vishvakarma's actions. All construction and creation need precise, accurate, skilled, and subtle measurements. That is why Vishvakarma's invocatory verse is: '*Danshapala mahavira suchitra karmakaraka, vishvakrit vishvadhriccha tvam rashana manadandadbrik*; O great hero, you hold pincers and create beautiful works, you have created this universe and sustain it, and you hold a rope and a weighing machine for measurement.'

Vishvakarma holds pincers, rope, and a weighing machine in three hands. And another hand bestows beauty to all that is created. This hand holds a *chandmala*, a festoon

with moon-like shapes. The moon is the symbol of beauty. Vishvakarma has chosen the elephant as his vehicle. For ages, the elephant has stood by the human beings in their numerous creations by being a crane for lifting things. A huge body is of great use. Knowledge, power, and height have a significant role. The obedience and subservience of the elephant have helped the human beings considerably in great works. Is the extent and variety work of human beings less? Workers have changed the instruments in the hands of Vishvakarma according to their trades, tastes, and wishes. Sometimes they have replaced the pincers and rope in Vishvakarma's hands with hammer, chisel, broom, and whatever else different workers considered appropriate. Weavers have changed the instruments all the more. Their Vishvakarma holds a weaving shuttle and has only two hands, not four. This Vishvakarma has a different vehicle too, the horse. The weavers also have a different time of Vishvakarma's worship, in the *Pausha* month of the Bengali Era.

There is another noteworthy feature of the four-armed Vishvakarma we know to ride on an elephant. Almost all the gods and goddesses of the Sanatana Dharma are worshipped according to the phases of the moon. However, Vishvakarma is worshipped according to the date. He is worshipped on the *Sankranti* or last day of the *Bhadra* month of the Bengali Era. Kartik is worshipped on the *Sankranti* of the *Kartik* month, the Charak puja is performed on the *Sankranti* of the *Chaitra* month. Apart from these and the *Makara-Sankranti* puja, I do not know of any puja that is performed according to the date.

It is also worth pondering that Vishvakarma is not just a mere deity. He has also entered the hands of human beings. That is why for ages many humans from various regions have created

wonderful awe-inspiring things. The Taj Mahal of India, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the pyramids of Egypt—the list is endless. Each one of those who created these is a Vishvakarma. And so, it seems that Vishvakarma is not a single individual. Or it could be that a single principle has born as many persons in different places and times, over and again. These Vishvakarmas are not mere workers or labourers. They are scientists and artists. Beautiful architecture, sculptures, and colourful artwork have been created around the world only by such human Vishvakarmas. Vishvakarma has had to become modern and more modern. He discovered fire, invented the wheel, and then created countless kinds of vehicles, not only those that could travel on land, but also on water and in the air. He has created observatories, space research centres, spaceships, and artificial satellites. He has also had to travel in space to ensure the proper working of the space shuttles and also to repair any malfunctioning part.

At the root of all this lies the unquenchable human curiosity to discover and learn, the intense human desire to prove that 'I can', the infinite potential of the human brain, and the talent for progress. Without these, one cannot even imagine of attaining the zenith

of success. The human beings have pondered much on the body. Even animals and insects strive to protect one's body and keep it free from diseases in the struggle for existence. It is true for human beings also. The human beings have explored and examined the body in varied ways to know its engineering, even resorting to dissection. The knowledge about the human body is constantly expanding. Surgery on the human body would have been impossible without Vishvakarma. The contribution of Vishvakarma to the removal and transplant of organs and also to various cosmetic surgeries cannot be denied.



Besides human beings, many animals have the capability to produce something beautiful. Beehive, termite hill, anthill, weaver bird's nest, rat's tunnel—there are countless examples like these. But these animals could not develop their art as much as the humans. They are stuck up with the same level of expertise for ages. On the other hand, the human being has progressed with time, not just because of the utility and the development of the human brain, but because of the thirst of beauty.

For survival, many living beings have been naturally endowed with tools like the teeth, nails, and horns, like the tortoiseshell,




Vishvakarma Temple, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

rhinoceros' skin, porcupine's quill, and snake's poison. However, the human being has not got anything like these. But the humans have used their amazing brains and have made a stick out of a tree's branch; have mastered the method of hunting animals or enemies by throwing stones; and have made weapons and instruments out of stones. With time, the human beings have mined metals and produced better and more useful tools. The humans have been continuously progressing; a progress that was not possible with the comparatively limited intellects of other living beings. Vishvakarma is with all the living beings in one way or the other. But not as much as he is with the humans.

The gods of knowledge, science, industry, and war have merged in Vishvakarma. If these gods are separated from Vishvakarma, then he will lose the breadth of his domain. If the gods of farming, book printing, production

of musical instruments, and the gods of all big and small works were to separate from Vishvakarma, he will lose his influence. He resides in knowledge and science. He can be found in palaeology, anthropology, architecture, physics, sculpture, and countless other disciplines of human knowledge. I have relied on language in this effort to describe Vishvakarma. It is surprising how many forms language can take! Its structure, syntax, tenses, persons, parts of speech, and many other components build the framework of a language. Its form is embellished and beautified by the subtle nuances and ease of usage. How many languages are created in different nooks and corners of the world! The better the structure of a language, the more utility it has. The spoken language is also within Vishvakarma's jurisdiction. So also is the human mechanism of mouth, throat, vocal chords, and ears, and all other organs responsible for hearing.

Still some questions remain unanswered. All the atoms and molecules; their structure; the amazing process of attraction and repulsion among them; the vast space with the proper distance maintained between the stars, planets, and satellites; our galaxy; light and darkness; good and evil; the ugly and the beautiful; sea and ocean; hills and mountains; desert and oasis; forests; the sentient and the insentient; living beings on land, in water, and in air; the food and water necessary for life; the process of inhalation and exhalation; life and death; procreation; mind, knowledge, wisdom, heart, intellect, and desire; likes and dislikes; love and affection; sound and its echo; the skill of listening; an aroma; ills and misfortunes; penury; relief; and all other things that do or do not come to mind—are all that created by Vishvakarma or is he dwelling in all of these or is he the omnipotent creator? How can one know? 



The Birds of Sri Ramakrishna: The Swan

Dr Suruchi Pande

THE SWAN HAS BEEN considered to be of a sublime nature both in ancient and modern texts, religious and secular. The noble character of this bird has been portrayed in popular culture too, in the West and the East. Sri Ramakrishna was called the *paramahamsa*, the Great Swan. He referred to the swan on various occasions:

Who may be called a paramahamsa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of milk and water, leaving aside the water. He who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand.¹

Again, the world is a mixture of milk and water, the bliss of God-Consciousness and the pleasure of sense-enjoyment. Be a swan and drink the milk, leaving the water aside (472).

If you put a mixture of milk and water before the swan, it will leave the water and drink only the milk (670).

Haven't you noticed the gait of a swan? It goes straight ahead in one direction. So it is with genuine devotees: they go toward God alone. They seek nothing else; they enjoy nothing else (*ibid.*).

A paramahamsa is always conscious that God alone is real and all else illusory. Only the swan has the power to separate milk from a mixture of milk and water. The swan's tongue secretes an acid that separates the milk from the mixture. The paramahamsa also possesses such a juice; it is his ecstatic love for God. That separates the Real from the mixture of the Real and the unreal. Through it one becomes aware of God and sees Him (699).



Brahma-Swan, Vireshwar Mandir, Varanasi.

Ornithological Information about the Swan

The Bar-Headed Geese are the revered and admired swans of the Manasa lake. They are also called *raja-hamsas*, royal swans. They breed in Ladakh and are overall pale grey geese with white head, face, and throat. The two dark bands on the back of the head are conspicuous. Their vibrant call 'aang, aang' is memorable.

White mute swans are seen in extremely cold areas of Arunachal Pradesh but no new

definite references of their occurrence are available. Perhaps the occurrences were recorded during their migration.

The Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*, is found in 'Pakistan and India. Adult is white with orange bill with black base and knob. Juvenile is mottled sooty-brown and has grey bill with black base.'² They are found in lakes and large rivers and their size varies from 125 to 155 cm. The Tundra Swan, *Cygnus columbianus*, is found in 'Pakistan, Nepal and India. Adult is white with black and yellow bill; yellow on bill typically as oval-shaped patch. Juvenile is smoky-grey with pinkish bill. Compared with Whooper Swan is smaller in size, with shorter neck and more rounded head' (ibid.). Found in lakes and large rivers and their sizes vary from 115 to 140 cm. The Whooper Swan, *Cygnus Cygnus*, is found in 'Pakistan, Nepal and India. Only recorded in 19th century. Adult is white with black and yellow bill; yellow on bill extends as wedge towards tip. Juvenile is smoky-grey, with pinkish bill. Longer neck and more angular head shape than Tundra' (ibid.). Was found in lakes and large rivers and was sized between 140 to 165 cm.

Swan, Cygnus, Hamsa in the Indian Context

In Sanskrit literature and Indian mythology the swan is considered as a noble bird, praised by many poets in a spiritual context and depicted in sculptures. This bird is the vehicle of Lord Brahma, the creator-god, and of Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

The *Kurma Purana* speaks of the swan as the symbol of infinity.³ The same text refers to a goddess named Hamsa (12.99). The *Agni Purana* speaks about swan as the vehicle of the goddess, Savitri.⁴

The migration of swans was also noted in Sanskrit literature. The *krauncha-randhra*, the mountain pass of the cranes is identified with



the Niti Pass in the Himalayas that is at a height of over five-thousand metres above sea level and connects Uttarakhand, India with Tibet. Similarly, there are references to migratory routes of swans in the Valmiki Ramayana,⁵ the Mahabharata,⁶ and *Meghaduta*.⁷

From this passage the wild geese—the Bar-headed Geese and Greylag Geese are also known as swans—take their way along the passes when they cross the Himalayas. It is traditional belief that the swan can separate milk from water and partake of only milk leaving the water. The metaphor of swan—the *hamsa* is applied to the philosophers of the highest order and highest intellect. They are called *paramahamsa* as was Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

In the Dhammapada, Lord Buddha says: ‘Swans fly on the path of the sun; people pass through the air by psychic powers; the wise are led away from the world after vanquishing Mara and his host.’⁸ Here the word *hamsa* is used in a philosophical sense.

Yaska defines the word *hamsa* as ‘the rays of the Sun’.⁹ Hamsa is the sun, the Atman because it wanders and it envelops everything. The word hamsa is derived from the root verb ‘*han*’, which means, among other things, to go, to conquer, and to overcome.

The metaphor of *hamsa* has been used from the Vedic times. We find in the Rig Veda: ‘Like a swan sitting in the floods he pants; wisest in mind mid men he wakes at morn.’¹⁰ This may be a reference to the unique trumpeting sound of the swan. Further, the Rig Veda says: ‘Decking the beauty of their forms in secret the swans with purple backs have flown down hither’ (7.59.7). Here we find a reference to the purple backed swans, which may be a reference to the black swan that is an endemic species in Australia.

The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* says: ‘The Sun god is like the holy swan.’¹¹ This text also says: ‘Let the

swan be offered to the wind god’ (24.35).

This is perhaps a subtle reference to the speedy flight of the swan for which reason it is connected to the wind god. There are numerous references to the swan in classical Sanskrit literature.

Hamsa in the Philosophical Context

‘In the *Nādabindūpaniṣad*, omkāra is compared with the swan. In the other upaniṣad called “*Bhikṣuka*”, the two types of monks were referred to as Hamsa and Paramahamsa.’¹² In the *Kṣurika Upaniṣad*, the soul is compared to the swan: ‘As the swan having cut the fetters, and with a mind free of doubt, ascends to the sky, so floats the soul in the world breaking all worldly bonds.’¹³ The Bhagavata says: ‘O Lord, Madhava, of mighty arms long time back you assumed the form of a swan and taught Brahma the supreme law.’¹⁴ The capacity of the swan to separate milk from water and accepting only milk is a sort of poetic convention. The power of discrimination is mainly highlighted in such comparison. Though the idea is imaginary it has impressed Sanskrit writers a lot. For example, Jagannatha says: ‘Oh swan, if you even are disposed to be idle in separating milk from water, who else on earth will fulfil your family vow?’¹⁵

Synonyms for the Swan

Sanskrit literature contains various descriptive words for the swan. For example, *chakranga*, curve-necked; *dhavala-garut-marala*, having white wings and yellowish red-coloured; *kala-kanta*, having pleasant calls; and *kerava*, having the sound ‘ke’, ‘ke’.





Swans Sculpted on Damekha Stupa, Sarnath

Concluding Remarks

Swans of the family *Anatidae* and genus *Cygnus* occur only on high altitude lakes in Arunachal Pradesh in India. Flamingos of the family *Phoenicopteridae* are not related to swans but they appear like swans when they swim in water. In ornithological terms, the swans have serrated beaks that are used to catch food like molluscs, fish, frogs, and aquatic algae. Geese of family *Anatidae*—often mistakenly called swans in traditional literature—are closely related to the swan, and have beaks with combed edges that are used for filter feeding. The flamingos have prominent comb-edged beaks for filter feeding, and they use the beaks to separate food from mud and other unwanted debris. It is certain that our ancestors had observed these aspects carefully, because these birds were often killed for food. The concept of separating unwanted material from the preferred food must have created a lasting impact on their minds and eventually the concept must have been glorified to the level of poetic fancy.

If we accept the word *hamsa* in relation to the sun then we can attempt to explain about its quality of discerning between milk and water. As water gets evaporated due to sunlight as the sun has the capacity to dry and make things clean, the power of discernment is required to have a clear decisive mental strength. That is what Sri Ramakrishna suggested by indicating the mixed nature of the world and instructing us to become swans.



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Brahma-Swan in Trimurti, Varanasi



Mandukya Upanishad

Swami Ranganathananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE ‘MANIFESTATION OF DEEP SLEEP, dream and waking is analogous to the throwing up of the rope by the juggler.’¹¹ A juggler who appears to have climbed up the rope; really he is just there, but he seems to have climbed up the rope. ‘As he, the juggler, remains on the ground unseen (by the on-lookers) having veiled himself, as it were, by his illusion, so also is the truth with the Highest Reality known as *Turīya*. Therefore those noble souls seeking *Mokṣa* [or liberation] evince interest in the contemplation of this (the *Turīya*) but not in the creation which is futile’ (ibid.).

What is the use of thinking of the creation? Let us think of the magician, not the magic. That is more important. *Svapnamayasārūpa*—alike in dream and illusion. It shows that all these false notions regarding manifestation ‘belong only to those who imagine the process of creation or manifestation’ (ibid.). Now take one sentence in Einstein: In the new physics there are the particles and there is the field. Both cannot be true for the field alone is true. This is the last sentence: The field alone is true. These are only temporary manifestations of that field. *Srishti* and *svapna-maya*—two types of creation.

‘*Ichchhamatram prabhoh srishtiriti srishtau vinishchitah, kalatprasutim bhutanam manjante kalachintakah.*’ Various states of creation are mentioned here. ‘Those who affirm (the existence of the created objects) attribute this manifestation to the mere will of god’ (41). God said that there will be light and there was light.

That is it. ‘While those who look upon time as real, declare time to be the manifestor of all beings’ (ibid.). In all cosmic evolution and astronomy time is real. Things go on manifesting in a particular order. ‘His will in reality cannot but achieve its purpose. Such objects as pot ... are but the (manifestation of the) will (of the potter). They can never be anything external or unrelated to such will. Some say manifestation proceeds from time’ (ibid.).

Then: ‘*Bhogartham srishtirityanye kridartham-iti chapare, devasyaisha svabhavo’yamaptakamasya ka spriha.*’ Vedantic answer is given in the second line. ‘Others think that the manifestation is for the purpose of enjoyment (of God) while still others attribute it to mere diversion (on the part of God)’ (42). A play. But Vedanta says: ‘It is the very nature of the Effulgent Being (Atman) (for), what other desire is possible for Him whose desire is always in the state of fulfilment?’ (ibid.). It is ever fulfilled, what external desire can it have? That is how Vedanta answers. Enjoyment of god; a diversion of God. God diverts himself like play. ‘These two theories are refuted (by the author) by the single assertion that it is the very nature of the Effulgent (Brahman)’ (ibid.). Brahman becomes the world. ‘Taking this standpoint ... all the theories (of creation) herein (stated) are refuted, for the reason indicated by: “What could be the desire for manifestation on the part of Brahman whose desires are ever in the state of fulfilment?”’ (ibid.).

‘For the rope ... to appear as snake, no other

reason can be assigned than *Avidyā* [ignorance]' (ibid.). A rope appearing as a snake; there is no reason, your blindness that is all. In all systems including astronomy, that Big Bang, the fire ball, in one millionth of a second, the universe banged and then started and expanded and is expanding. The first few seconds were very momentous in the theory of creation, according to astronomy, but what made it expand, what made it have a big bang nobody can say. It just happened, you can say, that is all. But in the case of pure consciousness it is its own nature—consciousness sometimes close, sometimes open, sometimes contracted, sometimes expanded. That is all.

Now Shankara's introduction to the Upanishad—the fourth quarter we are going to discuss now, in order, this is done in the words of the text. Not conscious of the internal objects—that is how the text will begin. The *Turiya* 'does not admit of the description or indication by means of words, for all uses (affirmative or negative) of language fail to express it. Therefore *Turiya* is sought to be indicated by the negation of all attributes' (44). Not this, not this, not this, that is the language. Then it becomes a nothingness. 'No, because it is impossible for imagination to exist without a substratum. The illusion of silver, a snake, a man, or a mirage ... cannot be conceived as existing without the corresponding substratum of the mother-of-pearl, rope, stump or desert' (ibid.).

Turiya is described in verse seven of the Upanishad. In the eleventh note earlier, it is written: '*Negating* ... the student, at first, by the process of negation separates Brahman from the superimposition and then realises that what has been negated as superimposition is, in fact, the very nature of Brahman' (47). When you separate the universe and Brahman is separate—*neti neti*, then look at universe, it is all Brahman only. What you negated you assert once again; it is all

Brahman. 'This is the highest Advaitic realisation' (ibid.). Everything is Brahman.

Now this negative description of *Turiya* is given: '*Na antahprajnam na bahishprajnam nobhayatahprajnam na prajnanaghanam na prajnam naprajnam. Adrishtam avyavaharyam agrahyam alakshanam achintyam avyapadeshyam ekatmapratyayasaram prapanchopashamam shantam shivamadvaitam chaturtham manyante sa atma sa vijneyah.*' That is the Atman that is to be realised. The last two words, '*sa atma*', that is the atman '*sa vijneyah*', that is to be realised.

'*Turiya* is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world' (ibid.). Meaning thereby, it is not *Taijasa*, the self in the dream who is consciously internal. So we negate: is it *Turiya*? No. Then the conscious external world that is *Vaishvanara*; is it the one? No. That which is conscious of the external objective world—no it says. 'Nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass all sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient' (47–8). All negated. '(It is) unseen (by any sense organ), [*adrishtam*] not related to anything' (48). Because there is no second thing to relate, *avyavaharyam*. All relation is between two things, if there is only one thing there is no relation. Incomprehensible by the mind, it says. *Agrahyam*—cannot be grasped by the mind. Uninferable—where there is no indicative characteristic based on which you can make an inference. Unthinkable—beyond the realm of thought, *Avyapadeshyam*, indescribable. *Vyapadesha* is giving a name and describing; it is not possible. And then: *Ekatmapratyayasaram*—that is the most important word there—of the nature of consciousness constituting the one Self alone.

Prapanchopashamam, the negation of all phenomena. *Prapancha* means this world, this changing world is called *prapancha*. The entire molecular structures of the universe—negate

them and then you get a quantum field energy. Once you see the energy, the quantum field, none of these exist for you. *Shivam shantam*, all peace, the Atman is described as all peace. *Shantam*: all the tensions of the world merge and dissolve in the Atman. It is like when the waves disappear in the ocean—that state is called *shantam*. All the waves have gone—calm, silent, *shantam*. *Shivam*, all bliss, all auspicious. *Shivam* means that which is blissful or auspicious. *Advaitam*, non-duality. You don't say one. You merely say non-duality. Purest logic is the language of non-duality. Don't say oneness. oneness implies duality. You only deny duality. That is a very, very subtle logical position, non-dual. 'This is what is known as the fourth (*Turiya*). This is the *Ātman* and it has to be realised' (ibid.).

Behind these waves of individual consciousness, there is one eternal infinite pure consciousness that is our nature. Another Upanishad says: '*Tat tvam asi*', you are that. Don't identify with the *Vishva*, don't identify with *Taijasa* or *Prajna*. You are that, you are that. The infinite Atman. This is a very interesting discussion. These are denials. All these are denied. '(*Turiya*) is "unseen", and because it is unseen therefore it is "incomprehensible". *Turiya* cannot be apprehended by the organs of action. *Alakṣaṇam* means 'uninferable' because there is no *Linga* (common characteristic) for its inference' (51). In all logical inference a common characteristic here and there is related and you make an inference. For instance: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal—the famous illustration in all books of logic. A common characteristic is taken and then universalised. Here there is no characteristic at all by which you could infer.

Hence it is unthinkable, indescribable; thought and speech cannot touch it. Unthinkable, because it is beyond the mind. Indescribable, beyond speech. Even the word Atman does

not comprehend it. Shankara says that the word 'Atman' and the concept of Atman do not touch the Atman. He has such wonderful thinking. It is 'essentially of the nature of consciousness consisting of Self. [Of the one Self.] *Turiya* should be known by spotting that consciousness that never changes in the three states' (ibid.). That is the *Turiya*. The Atman manifests clearly in all the three states as the 'I', 'I' background of everything; the infinite Atman that manifests in all the three states.

The Shruti also says the *Turiya* should be known by spotting that consciousness that never changes in the three states: waking, dream, sleep, and whose nature is that of a unitary self, non-dual self. 'The phrase may signify that the knowledge of the one *Ātman* alone is the means for realising *Turiya*, and therefore *Turiya* is the essence of this consciousness or Self or *Ātman*. The *Śruti* also says, "It should be meditated upon as *Ātman*"' (ibid.). *Atmetyevopasita*, that means your own Self, not something objective. Don't meditate upon the ultimate reality as a table or a chair or even as the sun, the moon, and stars. Your own Self is what the word 'Atman' denotes here.

'Several attributes, such as the "conscious of the subjective" ... associated with the manifestation [of *Vishva* and *Taijasa*] in each of the states have been negated' (ibid.). None of this can apply to *Turiya*.

By describing *Turiya* as 'the cessation of illusion', the attributes which characterise the three states ... are negated. Hence it is 'ever Peaceful' ... without any manifestation of change—and 'all bliss'. As it is non-dual ... devoid of illusory ideas of distinction, therefore it is called '*Turiya*', the 'Fourth', because it is totally distinct (in character) from the three quarters which are mere appearances. 'This, indeed, is the *Ātman* and it should be known', is intended to show that the meaning of the Vedic statement, 'That thou art' points to the relationless *Ātman* (51–2).

Atman has not a second thing to be related to; it itself is everything. 'Like the rope (in the illustration) different from the snake' (52). They are not two things there; only rope. But I see a snake. There is no relation there. You don't relate the snake to the rope because snake is only in your mind, not the object. 'That *Ātman* which has been described in such *Śruti* passages as, "unseen, but the seer", "the consciousness of the seer is never absent" ... should be known. (The incomprehensible) *Turiya* "should be known", and this is said so only from the standpoint of the previously unknown condition' (ibid.). Because we don't know it now; because it is always known. Only thing is you and I, we do not know now. You are busy with the waking and dream states. 'Duality cannot exist when the Highest Truth is known' (ibid.). It is not a separate thing called *Turiya*. There is no duality, but in relation to the original state, we call it the fourth. Actually, it is just one, non-dual, the highest bliss.

Then Gaudapada says: '*Nivritteh sarva-duhkhanam ishanah prabhuravyayah, advaitah sarvabhavanam devasturyo vibhuh smritah*.' 'In it, indicated as the changeless and the Supreme Lord, there is a cessation of all miseries [all sorrow]. It is the one without the second among all entities. It is known as the *Turiya* (Fourth), effulgent and all-pervading' (57).

In all the three states these distinctions and relations come; not the fourth one.

The three states are said to be in the *Ātman* because we, as *Turiya*, cognize them. Therefore all misery as well as its cause associated with the three states, are imagined by us to subsist in *Turiya*. It is because we do not realise this that we identify ourselves with the states and that we suffer from various kinds of miseries. But a complete cessation of miseries ensues if we realize *Atman* as *Turiya* and thus witness the appearance and disappearance of ideas, viz., the states without identifying ourselves with [each one of] them (58).

We can pass through all this just like in a film you see, you don't identify yourself with it, you enjoy it, that's all.

Then: '*Karyakaranabaddhau tau ishyete vishvataijasau, prajnah karanabaddhastu dvau tau turye na siddhyatah*.' '*Viśva* and *Taijasa* are conditioned by cause and effect' (ibid.). All cause and effect determinism obtain only in waking and dream. 'But *Prājña* is conditioned by cause alone' (ibid.). There is no effect, only cause in the *Prajna* state. 'These two (cause and effect) do not exist in *Turiya*' (ibid.). It is beyond cause and effect.

The generic and specific characters of waking and dream and sleep and the *Turiya* are described. This will help us to understand the *Turiya*. '*Karya*' means the effect, '*karana*' is the cause. In Sanskrit, *karya-karana-baddha*, both are one—*karya, karana*—unity of cause and effect. *Prajna* is conditioned by cause alone. The cause or the reappearance of the dream and waking is there in *Prajna*. They went into it and came out of it. When causality is removed you get the *Turiya* state. 'Cause' meaning thereby the non-apprehension of reality. What do you get in sleep? Non-apprehension of reality in sleep is the condition of *Prajna*. Therefore these two, cause and effect—non-apprehension and misapprehension of reality. In waking and dream there is misapprehension, in sleep there is non-apprehension. These two cease to exist in the *Turiya*; not possible in *Turiya*.

Causal state is called the *bija* or the seed state. Seed and the tree—cause and the effect. There we do not see the truth. Say for example, take a seed, can you see the tree? Can you see the flower? Nothing. That's called the causal state—non-apprehension. From it follows the result, *phalam*, which is misapprehension of truth. Once you have non-apprehension, you have misapprehension, wrong apprehension. In dream and waking

there are both, non-apprehension and misapprehension, both are there. 'But in deep sleep, there is only non-apprehension. As a matter of fact these two conditions mis-apprehension and non-apprehension, cannot be experienced separately. They have been differently classified only to facilitate understanding' (59).

'*Natmanam na paramshchaiva na satyam napi chanritam, prajnah kinchana samvetti turyam satsarvadriksada.*' '*Prājña* does not know anything of the self or the non-self, nor truth nor untruth' (ibid.). In deep sleep; nobody can commit a crime in deep sleep, or do a virtuous act in deep sleep. Can you give a donation in deep sleep? Can you steal? Nothing can you do. Neither good nor bad you can do in deep sleep. Whereas in dream you can do any of these and in waking, of course we do. All our crimes are in the waking state.

'*Prājña* does not know anything of the self or the non-self, nor truth nor untruth. But *Turiya* is ever existent and ever all-seeing. ... How is that *Prājña* is conditioned by cause? And how is it, again, that the two conditions of non-apprehension and mis-apprehension of Reality do not exist in *Turiya*? It is because *Prājña* does not, like *Viśva* and *Taijasa*, perceive anything of the duality' (ibid.). Only when you see duality all these problems arise. In *Prajna* there is no duality.

External to and other than itself and born of the cause known as *Avidyā*. Therefore it is conditioned by darkness characterised by non-apprehension of Reality which is the cause of mis-apprehension. As *Turiya* exists always, ever all-seeing, on account of the absence of anything other than *Turiya*, it is never associated with the causal condition characterised by non-apprehension of Reality. Consequently mis-apprehension of Reality which is the result of non apprehension is not found in *Turiya*. For, it is not possible to find in the sun, whose nature is to be ever-luminous, anything contrary to light (59–60).

In the earth we can see. That is 'darkness, or any other light different from itself. The *Śruti* also says: "The Knowledge of the seer is never absent." Or the phrase may be explained thus: *Turiya* may be designated as ever all-seeing because it subsists in all' (60). Waking, dream, sleep—everywhere, it is *Turiya*. 'This is also borne out by the following *Śruti* passage, "there is no seer other than this"' (ibid.). Only one seer.

The other day, an ophthalmic conference was going on in Hyderabad. A doctor of ophthalmology came there. To him I said: 'In Shankara's commentary there is one sentence.' He became excited over it. Shankara said: 'Sight is twofold—temporary and eternal.' Temporary sight is what you call the eye. Sometimes you can see, sometimes you don't see, and sometimes you get into trouble with the eye, but the light of the Atman, that sight is always there. So Shankara's one sentence that doctor took it immediately for his purpose. '*Drishtih dvividha, laukiki paramarthiki cha.*' Sight is twofold—one is worldly, which is temporary, the other is *paramarthiki*, universal, eternal, that can never be removed. Even the blind man—his knowledge of the Atman is the same. So these are the two eyes there are for sight and in between there is the third eye, *prajna-chakshu*. That is why in India people put a mark on the forehead at more or less this place. *Prajnachakshu*, the eternal eye of the vision.

'*Dvaitasya agrahanam tulyam ubhayoh prajna turyayoh, bijanidrayutah prajnah sa cha turye na vidyate.*' What a fine analysis and classification! 'The non-cognition of duality is common to both *Prājña* and *Turiya*' (ibid.). In both states you don't cognise duality—both in deep sleep and in *Turiya*. And in the other two states you cognise duality—waking and dream. But '*Prājña* is associated with sleep in the form of cause and this (sleep) does not exist in *Turiya*' (ibid.).

What is sleep? Non-apprehension; that does not exist in the *Turiya*. In sleep you have non-apprehension. Mis-apprehension in these two—waking and dream—non-apprehension there. This non-apprehension does not exist in the *Turiya*. This is the causal state, this is trans-causal.

‘This *śloka* is meant to remove a doubt that has arisen incidentally. The doubt is this: How is it that it is *Prājñā* alone and not *Turiya* that is bound by the condition of cause, since the non-cognition of duality is the common feature of both?’ (61). Why do not you say that *Turiya* also has got non-apprehension? ‘This doubt is thus removed: The meaning of the phrase *Bijanidrāyuta* is: *Nidrā* or sleep is characterised by the absence of the Knowledge of Reality’ (ibid.). In sleep you have the absence of the knowledge of reality—that is the sleep state. ‘This is the cause which gives rise to the cognition of varieties’ (ibid.). Therefore you descend to waking and dream, where varieties exist. ‘*Prājñā* is associated with this sleep which is the cause. It is because *Turiya* is ever all-seeing, therefore the sleep characterised by the absence of the Knowledge of Reality does not exist in *Turiya*’ (ibid.). That is why you say: ‘He is going to sleep as a fool, returns back a fool also.’ No change at all. The same fool who went to sleep and returns. Non-apprehension means that. But in *Turiya* when you go everything is different—pure consciousness. ‘Therefore the bondage in the form of causal condition does not exist in *Turiya*’ (ibid.). That causal relation of non-apprehension gives rise to mis-apprehension, wrong apprehension.

‘The contention that *Turiya* and *Prājñā* are both characterised by the condition of cause on account of the common feature of the non-perception of duality in both the cases, is due to a wrong inference based upon insufficient data. The *Prājñā* is thought to be the causal state

because it is the immediately preceding condition of the manifestations of the waking [and dream state] ... But this does not apply to *Turiya* because it is not the immediately preceding condition of any state. *Turiya* is not a state which is antecedent or subsequent to any other state. It is the substratum of all the states. [Eternal ‘I’ behind all the changing ‘I’s.] *Turiya* is non-dual, changeless and pure consciousness itself. Hence it cannot be said to produce anything. Therefore causal condition cannot obtain in the case of *Turiya*’ (61).

So what you call the causeless, that alone can be the absolute. Whatever is causal is relative. So relativity covers all aspects of cause and effect relation. Go beyond it, it is pure absolute—all one and non-dual. Absolute cannot be two, only one. Shankara asks the question: ‘When is one established in *Turiya*? It is thus replied: During the states of dream and waking when one wrongly cognises Reality like the perception of the snake in the place of the rope, he is said to be experiencing dream. *Nidrā* or sleep, characterised by ignorance of Reality’ (62–3). That is the meaning of the word ‘*nidra*’: ignorance of reality. It is the common feature of the three states—waking, dream, and sleep. In all the three states you don’t cognise reality. That is why it is called *nidra*—all the three. Real waking is only *Turiya*, where you are always aware of the reality, pure consciousness. The other states are all reflections of pure consciousness—the waking and dream.

Now, these ideas are appearing in many books dealing with the nature of reality. Just now I was reading an English journal on the study of reality published by a group in England. There I read a scientist’s lecture and the introduction by the editorial team from London. There it is said: ‘Is the world a reflection of the Atman or is Atman a reflection of the world?’ Till now scientists said

that the Atman is a reflection of the world. Now the truth is otherwise, it is told there. The world is the reflection of the Atman.

‘*Nidrā* or sleep, characterised by the ignorance of Reality, is the common feature of the three states. *Viśva* and *Taijasa*, on account of their having the common feature of *Svapna* (dream) and *Nidrā* (sleep), form a single class’ (62–3). That is, waking and dream form one class. There you cognise duality and there is non-apprehension of reality.

That *Nidrā* (sleep) which is characterised by the predominance of wrong apprehension (of Reality) constitutes the state of inversion which is *Svapna* (dream). But in the third state, *Nidrā* (sleep), alone, characterised by the non-apprehension of Reality is the only inversion. ... This forms the second or the other class implied in the text. ... Therefore when these two classes of the nature of effect and cause, characterised by the misapprehension and non-apprehension respectively (of Reality), disappear by the destruction of the inversion characterised by effect and cause, by the knowledge of the nature of the Highest Reality, then one realises *Turiya* which is the goal. Then one does not find in *Turiya* this condition, the characteristics of which are these two (effect and cause), and one thus becomes firm in the Highest Reality which is *Turiya* (63).

‘*Nidra*’ means sleep. It includes the three states of waking, dream, and sleep. All the three states are characterised by the absence of the knowledge of reality. That is called *nidra*, that is, sleep. A very interesting logic you will find in the next chapter. ‘Whatever is seen is unreal’—that is the sentence. In the beginning, the logic: Whatever is seen is unreal. The seer alone is real. That is going to come there.

Read the book on scientific outlook by Bertrand Russell, a pre-war book—post-war things are revolutionary things. Even pre-war, there was

scientific outlook. There he says that according to today’s science in whatever we see, we see only ourselves. Objects and other things are nothing but oneself. That is the conclusion you come to. He says it in the language of present-day science.¹² Here it is the same. Normally, what do we mean by unreal? What you do not see is unreal and what you see is real. Here, we are going to say that whatever you see is unreal. To be seen is the characteristic of being unreal. You reverse the whole thing. To be seen is the one test of being unreal and waking and dream are seen and so they are unreal. That is the logic. The seer alone is real. If you only come to the seer this logic will apply, otherwise this logic will not apply. Generally, to be seen is to be real. On the contrary, here to be seen is unreal. We are going to study that. Because, there is something else.

I have dealt with it in a different way in the book *Science and Religion*.¹³ We are in search of fundamental particles. We thought molecules were fundamental. Then came the atom. Democritus’s atom is the modern molecule. Then came the atom, then the subatomic particles. So many new particles we have been creating through our accelerators, thinking this is fundamental or this one is fundamental. Now quarks are fundamental. Still, they are searching. It is your technical inability not to be able to break it. You can go on breaking. Any particle can be broken indefinitely unless your technology prevents. That is all. In that book I have said that the search for fundamental reality in these external particles is an impossibility. You can always go on cutting further and further but if at all you want to see fundamental particle, fundamental reality, indivisible, you must go to the Self. That is the indivisible, not the object. The seer, not the seen. There you can see indivisibility. Schrödinger says that consciousness is one and indivisible.¹⁴

You cannot divide consciousness. Satchidananda is an ocean. You may put a stick here and a stick there in the ocean and say, 'Oh yes! I have divided the ocean.' What a foolish thing to say! If you think that you have divided the ocean you will be fooling yourself. The ocean is indivisible. So, if at all there is any undivided reality, indivisible reality—don't seek it in the *drishyam*, the world of objects. Seek it in the world of the *drik*, the seer. There Vedanta discovered the one indivisible reality of the Atman as pure consciousness. That is the challenge thrown to science. Today's technology will not be able to divide these quarks further but probably hundred years later more powerful accelerators can come. You would have broken it still further, still further, still further. A fraction of a second is their life, but still you create. But, later on, the subject changes. We are not searching for particles in that low level; you go deep you see only resonances. A new word enters there, 'resonances', more like a sound. Matter is nothing but a sound. And again you have come to this theory of sound: *Sphotavada*, God as the word. The sound Om and it comes to Om; that is all, the whole thing is Om. So, resonance comes there in physics dealing with fundamental particles, dealing with quarks, and the like.

Now the next sentence in this connection is a very important and highly quoted verse: '*Anadimayaya supto yada jivah prabudhyate, ajamanidramasvapnamadvaitam budhyate tada.*' 'When the Jiva or the individual soul sleeping ... not knowing the Reality ... under the influence of the beginningless *Māyā*'¹⁵ or ignorance for ages. They have been in this state of ignorance for ages, because reality we don't know. We see the world, we see the objects, we see everything, but reality we do not see. When this jiva wakes up from this sleep of non-apprehension of

reality, then what does it realise? It then realises itself as the non-dual, beginningless, and dreamless reality of the Atman. This Atman is dreamless, wakingless, beginningless reality. That you realise as 'I am that'; 'That is my true nature'. It is a very important verse. *Anadi* maya—maya, which is beginningless. This kind of perception of wrong things in the world, when did it start? You go back in time, go back, go back; you will never find the end at all. Ask the question in your dream. When did this dream begin? Beginningless; a dreamer's dream is beginningless but yet it is not endless. Beginningless but endful. All ignorance is beginningless but endful. Why? When you strike a matchstick in a cave which is dark since the beginning of creation, within one second all darkness vanishes though it is beginningless. So beginningless can be endful. All ignorance of the true nature of the Atman or our own true nature, though beginningless, it ends. When this knowledge comes and the Atman is known, then you realise: 'I have always been this Atman not that today I have become the Atman. I have always been this Atman but ignorance created this condition of illusion and delusion. I mistook myself as this and that.' That is a very important verse. *Prabudhyate*, when you wake up from this sleep of non-apprehension of reality—that is the meaning of sleep, non-apprehension of reality—then you realise *ajam*, the unborn; *anidram*, without any sleep; *asvapnam*, without any dream; *advaitam*, the non-dual self. *Tada budhyate*, he realises this as his true nature. That is the highlight of this series of verses, this particular verse.

Let us now see Shankara's commentary on it. 'One who is called the *Jiva*, the individual soul, [this I so and so, that limited self] (whose characteristic is to be) subject to the law of transmigration, [constantly dying, born, dying, born, that is what a jiva is concerned with] sleeping

under the influence of *Māyā*' (ibid.). That is the language. Maya has got two aspects as Sri Ramakrishna has said: one that pulls you down, another that pulls you up. Both are maya. When you sit in meditation, that is maya. When you do murder, that is also maya. All within maya but one is called *vidya*-shakti and the other is called *avidya*-shakti of the same maya.

So, this human system is a playground of the forces of maya. You have the power to alter or develop it by choosing the maya that takes you up. That freedom is yours. That is called ethical sense, moral development, spiritual development—everything, or to be pulled up—you have got the freedom. That is called maya-shakti. Sri Ramakrishna said about *avidya*-maya, *vidya*-maya. If you see corruption in society, a wife can stop a husband being corrupt. But wife can also induce him to be corrupt. So, she becomes an *avidya*-maya influence. He can be the same with respect to her *avidya*-maya influence or *vidya*-maya. So, this is a beautiful, practical idea given by Sri Ramakrishna of the concept of maya—*avidya*-shakti, *vidya*-shakti; *avidya*-maya, *vidya*-maya. And our heart is the playground of both and for us it is to choose. In the *Katha Upanishad* second chapter you read, that one is called pleasure and the other is called welfare. Both these approach every human being. Those who want instant satisfaction they adopt pleasure. Those who want ultimate welfare they adopt ethical life called *shreya*—*preya* and *shreya*. And one is *avidya* and the other is *vidya*. These words come in the opening verse of the second chapter of the *Katha Upanishad*: '*Shreyashcha preyashcha manushyametaḥ*.' *Shreya*

and *preya* come to every human being—please take me, please take me; picturesque description. I will be your companion, please take me. He who is subject to the tyranny of immediate, pleasant experience, he chooses *preya*.

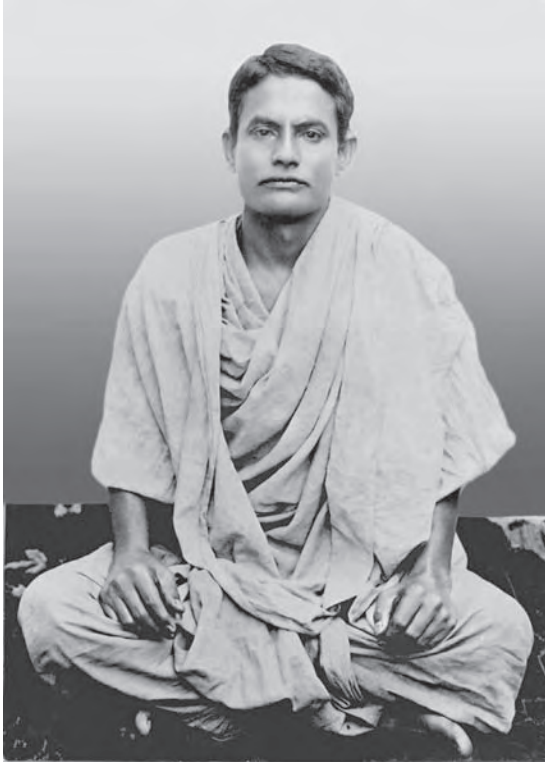
(To be continued)

Notes and References

11. *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad With Gauḍapāda's Kārikā and Śaṅkara's Commentary*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 40.
12. The reference is to: 'The world that we can picture is the world that we see.' Bertrand Russell, *The Scientific Outlook* (London: Unwin, 1954), 69.
13. See Swami Ranganathananda, *Science and Religion* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013).
14. See 'Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown.' Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?* (London: Cambridge University), 89.
15. *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad With Gauḍapāda's Kārikā and Śaṅkara's Commentary*, 64.

Erwin Schrödinger (1887–1961)





Swami Premananda's Teachings

Swami Omkareshwarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

'Crown and Glory of Life is Character'— Self-help

Swami Premananda said: 'All of you realise God—burn away egotism and pride. Everything has to be cooked if you come here (in the refuge of Sri Ramakrishna)—everything has to be soft; but you have to keep the sword of truth to cut untruth or lie. One has to be very firm then.'

'Character is needed. If the character is not moulded, one cannot progress in anything, in the present, past, or any time. Just see, how much welfare would have been done to the world if the anarchists did not squander their energy and had directed it to God! And how much bloodshed and loss of power has the great war of Europe⁴ brought! On top of this, they say, "We are civilised"! Everything is the play of Mahamaya, dear! You emulate their power and endeavour and direct it to God.'

'O Lord, neither the gods nor the demons comprehend your glory.'⁵

Swami Premananda continued: 'How many could understand Sri Ramakrishna? Even we

[meaning the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna] have not yet completely understood him. When Swamiji returned from America, one of us asked him at the Alambazar Math: 'What have you understood of Sri Ramakrishna?' Swamiji replied: 'Brother, I have not understood anything. I can just see his outline.'

Chapter 2

Today is Friday, *Ekadashi* of *krishna-paksha*, 3 December 1915. Hanuman's puja, vespers, and *Ramanama-sankirtana* would be conducted in the evening in the visitors' room of the Belur Math. The arrangements are being made since afternoon. The sun has receded in the horizon. The vesper service of Sri Ramakrishna has started. It was followed by the singing of hymns. The sweet melodious music charmed the minds of devotees and gradually became one with the atmosphere. The devotees prostrated before Sri Ramakrishna and partook of holy water.

It was around 7 p.m. Hanuman's puja, offerings, and vesper service had ended. Now, the sweet *Ramanama-sankirtana* would be sung. It was Swamiji's ardent desire that the embodiment of brahmacharya, Hanuman should be worshipped in Bengal, so that restraint and brahmacharya was re-established in the minds of the hope of future India, the youth and women.

Accordingly, Swami Brahmananda started Hanuman's puja and the singing of *Ramanama-sankirtana* on *Ekadashi* days at the Belur Math and various other places in Bengal. The life of Hanuman—the son of the great ascetic woman Anjana—is an ideal life.

The *Ramanama-sankirtana* is about to begin. Dedicated to Sri Ramachandra, the highest ideal of devotion in the attitude of a servant, *dasa*, having one-pointed devotion to the chosen ideal, the son of the wind-god, the one bowing the head in salutation—Hanuman is praying at the feet of Sri Ramachandra, with tear-filled eyes and a voice choked with emotion:

*Nanya spriha raghupate hridaye'smadiye
Satyam vadami cha bhavan-akhilantaratma
Bhaktim prayachchha raghupungava
nirbharam me
Kamadidosharahitam kuru manasam cha.*

O Sri Ramachandra, the jewel of the Raghu lineage, give me pure devotion, give me surrender, and make my mind free of defects like lust. I truly say that you are the inner self of me and the entire universe. My mind does not desire anything other than pure devotion.

The pure-minded devotees of Belur Math started the *sankirtana* by becoming one with the heartfelt prayer of Hanuman. The entire story of Sri Ramachandra condensed in one hundred and eight verses was sung. All were spellbound by the *Ramanama-sankirtana*, sung by the celibate monks following the ideal of Hanuman since youth and the devotees. The devotees who were just listening to the *sankirtana* were enjoying every bit of this nectarine singing. It appeared as if the embodiment of servant-devotion, son of the wind-god, Hanuman had descended there.

Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) was listening to the *sankirtana* sitting to the right of the feet of Hanuman decked with flower-garland. He was going into ecstasy now and then.

Finally, everyone could clearly see that his holy divine body was shedding tears and entering into deep samadhi with his hairs standing on their end, hearing these words of the *sankirtana*:

*Ram Ram jaya Raja-Ram
Ram Ram jaya Sita-Ram
Sita-Ram jaya Raja-Ram
Raja-Ram jaya Sita-Ram
Sita-Ram, Sita-Ram, Sita-Ram
Raja-Ram, Raja-Ram, Raja-Ram
Jaya jaya Sita jaya jaya Ram
Jaya jaya Ram jaya jaya Sita
Ram Ram Ram Sitaram*

After the *sankirtana* ended, all prostrated with devotion before Hanuman and Baburam Maharaj. Baburam Maharaj too prostrated before Hanuman.

The monks and devotees are sitting intently looking at Swami Premananda, eager to hear his nectarine words. Then Swami Premananda, who was steadfastly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna—who was kind to his devotees—saluted Sri Ramakrishna and said:

'No other person pure like Sri Ramakrishna has born in this world. He could not touch impure persons. If some impure person touched him, he would cry in pain, "Ah!" Purity alone is religion. Purity alone is devotion. He was the embodiment of purity.

'All of you make your minds pure, making him your ideal. Whenever lust and greed, hatred and violence, and selfishness will try to enter your mind, then remember Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and firmly drive away those impurities. And frequently repeat these mantras of purity: "O Lord, let my skin, flesh, blood, fat, marrow, nerves, and bones be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins. Let my speech, hands, feet, and organs of excretion and procreation be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins. Let my mind, eyes, ears, tongue, nose,

intellect, and resolve be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins. Let my in-breath, out-breath, diffused-breath, up-breath, and middle breath be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins. Let earth, water, space, fire, and air be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins. Let my Atman be pure and holy. Let me be free of passions and sins.”⁶

All were speechless, astounded, and meditative. Everyone’s mind had been uplifted to some unknown pure celestial kingdom of indescribable devotional fervour. This was not teaching through mere words but the transmission of spiritual current. Those who listened to this were uplifted by three to four levels of spirituality.

Remaining silent for a while, Swami Premananda started talking again: ‘All of you become pure. Make your mind clean of hatred, violence, selfishness, and egotism. Always post the sentry of knowledge near the door of your mind. Beware! Let not any impure thought enter your mind. Such thoughts are the thorns on the path to God.

‘Burn your mind in the fire of austerity and dispassion. Mould your life in this manner. Only then can you get God’s grace and attain God’s abode. Then you will see that the one infinite omnipotent blissful God resides in you and all other living beings. I am able to see this clearly. But, alas, the individual soul is so blind, so egotistic, that it is unable to see God and is hawk-eyed on lust and greed.

‘If you have come to become a monk, then sacrifice the rascals, egotism and selfishness. Only then would you be able to become a proper monk, a world-teacher. The Bhagavata says that true devotees are live images of God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.”⁷ “It is not I! It is not I! It is all Thou!” (891).’

Saying this, Swami Premananda was gradually

overwhelmed with spiritual fervour and started repeating these words, closing his eyes and clapping his hands: ‘Glory to God, glory to God, it is not I, it is not I, it is all thou, it is all thou.’

He said again: ‘Is religion just lecturing, not bothering about the purification of the mind. That increases egotism and one is deflected from the path of God. Are mere words of any avail? “This wisdom is not to be attained through mere argumentation.”⁸ Many lecture on religion and many write about it too, but how many are practising it? If it is not embedded in one’s mind, can anyone practise these truths?

‘Show it through your life. Only then would people listen to you. I want life—a life burning with renunciation. Let your mouths shut. Let your work speak for itself. Refraining from talking, show whose disciples you are through your work! You are the children of the Divine Mother. You are the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Let worldly name and fame be like filth to you. Do not bother about whether people would praise or condemn. Purify your mind and heart; establish the Divine Mother and Sri Ramakrishna there, and silently work as their instruments aligning your thoughts and words. The monastery is not a place for frivolities. Swamiji started this monastery for making true human beings. True human beings cannot be created without religion, character, and only by textual wisdom. Those that would get trained here will alone be the people with character and ideal.’

(To be continued)

Notes and References

4. The World War I was being fought then.
5. Bhagavadgita, 10.14.
6. The allusion is to the *Viraja-Homa* mantras found in the *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 65–6.
7. M., The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 630.
8. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.9.

The Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Life

Swami Nityasthananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Sense of Fulfilment

EVOLUTIONISTS OPINE THAT when evolution reaches human beings, happiness consists primarily in the sense of fulfilment, not in sense gratification. As human beings, we must aspire for the joy of fulfilment, not for external achievement. How does this sense of fulfilment arise? When the potential within is expressed. A seed can be used in different ways; however, its purpose of existence is fulfilled only when it is allowed to grow into a tree manifesting its inner essence. Similarly, our life also can be made use of in several ways, but the real fulfilment comes when what is inside is given outward expression.

First, there are many talents and capacities in us. Through different activities and practices we must try to express these things and also encourage others to do so. This will give a sense of fulfilment. If the talents and capacities are blocked or suppressed due to various social and individual factors, then there is the likelihood of plummeting into some nervous disorder.

Second, we have to give expression to our love and charity. In this regard, service activities are important. Small children possess these virtues. In course of time they learn to become selfish, thanks to the influence of parents and social pressure. Many suffer throughout their lives, always expecting love and sympathy from others, and not being satisfied by any amount of love and sympathy extended towards them. The solution to this problem is not expectation but expression.

A young man was suffering from severe

depression without finding any meaning in life. The only way open to him was to end his life, and he was going towards a river with that intention. When he approached the bank of the river, he found some fish wriggling in despair, being swept to the ground by the current of water. Seeing their plight he picked up one fish and put it back in water. Seeing the fish gleefully swim, it struck him that he could find meaning in life by making others happy. Then he gave up the idea of committing suicide and returned home.

Third, the expression of our inner goodness that is natural to us. There is a tendency in every one to be good, and no one wants to be bad. Even the most wicked person thinks that whatever one is doing in a given situation is not wrong. Many people indulge in immoral activities pressurised by circumstances and in course of time that becomes their habit. Strong desires and temptations compel some to adopt dubious means of fulfilling them. According to Swami Vivekananda, the main causes of wanton and unethical behaviour are weakness and fear. Telling the truth, not to injure others, not to take away the things of others—all these are our natural state. A compulsion alone will prompt us to behave otherwise. Goodness is being simple and natural.

Fourth is the manifestation of potential divinity, which is the highest and includes within itself all other manifestations. This is the fulfilment of all other manifestations, and when this is attained everything is attained. While climbing the summit of a mountain, there may be some

resting places from where we can get a panoramic view of the vast horizon. However, when we reach the top of the mountain, the entire vista around the mountain opens up before us. When a seed is sown and nurtured to grow into a huge tree, it will contribute flowers, fruits, fragrance, and the like. Even so, when one's inner divinity is awakened, it will express itself in the form of goodness, love, talent, perfection in work, and the like. All spiritual practices are nothing but different attempts to manifest this divinity. Even a fraction of its manifestation is of immense benefit to us, filling our inner being with peace and satisfaction. As it is said in the Bhagavadgita: 'Even a little spiritual progress will protect one from the greatest fear.'¹⁴

Mind Deceives Us

In spiritual life, many of our desires that are not in concurrence with our spiritual aspiration get repressed. There are the unscrupulous, who conveniently give in to worldly desires and yet maintain that they hold on to their spiritual aspiration. Their case is entirely different. These repressed desires may crop up taking different forms. Some spiritual aspirants suffer intensely being unable to control their weaknesses and at the same time not able to withstand their onslaught. In such a situation what is essential is infinite patience. Sri Aurobindo says: 'Aspire intensely, but without impatience. ... If there are difficulties, stumblings or failures, one has to look at them quietly and call in tranquilly and persistently the Divine help for their removal, but not to allow oneself to be upset or pained or discouraged. Yoga is not an easy path and the total change of the nature cannot be done in a day.'¹⁵

When it becomes impossible to resolve conflicts between our spiritual ideal and certain weaknesses, the mind will try to convince us through certain methods that psychologists call mental mechanisms:

Fantasy • This is common phenomenon.

Especially when we are in anxiety or sorrow, we wander into an imaginary world, sliding away from reality. If there is an intense desire for name and fame that remains unfulfilled, we get some amount of satisfaction by vividly imagining that we are being honoured in a function or some such thing. We imagine of defeating in an argument, a person, who we cannot face in real life. In this manner we indulge in all sorts of imaginations and like to remain in a beggar's dreamy world. The discontent mind gets some consolation through such day-dreaming. Those who are suffering from severe mental maladies may not find any difference between fantasies and reality. These day-dreaming episodes indicate different kinds of desire hiding within us, and they also accentuate these desires. We must try to live a real and authentic life instead of fantasising.

Identification • When we cannot fulfil a particular desire, we identify ourselves with the person who possesses that capacity and thereby derive some amount of satisfaction. This kind of identification is common among children. Some youngsters are found to identify themselves with some movie or cricket idol. Some people obsessed with lecturing try to imitate Swamiji's extraordinary oratory, not emulating his ideals. Pratap Chandra Hazra used to consider himself to be as spiritually great as Sri Ramakrishna. 'Identification may be defined as the method by which a person takes over the features of another and makes them incorporate part of his own personality. One learns to reduce tension by modeling one's behavior after that of someone else.'¹⁶

(To be continued)

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Svarajya Siddhih of Gangadharendra Sarasvati —Attaining Self-dominion

Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

FROM YOUR STANDPOINT, who brings about the coming together of the different elements and molecules since you do not accept a sentient doer?

Objection: But, we do see that *pratitya-samutpada*, dependent origination—the characteristic of an effect being subservient—has two causes, *hetu-upanibandha*, causal relation and *pratyaya-upanibandha*, conditional relation. The *hetu-upanibandha* or the causal relation is the group of causes starting from the seed to the effect of the fruit. The giving rise of one effect to the other by the chain of an effect becoming the next cause leads to one cause depending upon the other cause and so on. The relation between such causes—that are a combination of other causes like the six elements: earth, water, fire, air, space, and season, leading from one effect to the next effect—is *pratyaya-upanibandha* or conditional relation: ‘When a sprout is born from a seed, which is a cause, on account of the combination of the six elements.’²

Further, *hetu-upanibandha* establishes the difference between a banyan-tree sprout from other sprouts like that of *kutaja*, conessi. And, *pratyaya-upanibandha* gives different qualities to a seed from the six elements: The seed gets its hardness from earth, moisture from water, maturity from fire, growth from air, non-obstruction

for growth from space, and changes from season. The seed does not think: ‘I produce the sprout.’ Nor does the sprout think: ‘I am produced by the seed.’ By the analysis of *anvaya-vyatireka*, co-presence and co-absence, the mutual dependence of the seed and sprout is established. This further implies that for an action to take place, we do not always need a sentient doer. It has also been said: ‘*Utpadadva tathagatanam anutpadadva sthitaivesham dharmanam dharmata*; whether or not the Tathagatas were to arise, this nature of things has remained.’³ So, there is no need for a sentient doer for the molecules and elements to come together as the nature of things would remain the same even without a doer.

Reply: No, that cannot be so. Is the conduciveness of the causal and conditional relations for the production of the sprout and the like, independent of the other or dependent? We cannot accept that such a process is independent because then there would be no cessation of such activity. And if we accept that the production of the sprout and the like is dependent on the other, then since no sentient doer is accepted, it would lead to infinite regress. Further, are the combinations following in order, the earlier combinations done in the same manner as the earlier combinations, or differently, or is there no order? If it is held that the combinations are done in a similar manner

then the production of the sprout from the seed, thereafter the production of the stem, and further, leaves, flowers, and so on, cannot be explained as they are all of different combinations. If it is held that the combinations are different from the earlier ones then it would lead to chaos as every moment at all times would be completely different from the previous moment and they would be discrete and separate. However, we see that once the seed comes into existence, it is capable of producing the sprout, stem, leaves, flowers, and the like. The seed produces the sprout, even it is with variations; the production happens always. Also, if it is held that the combinations are completely different from the previous ones, then the production of a particular sprout from a particular seed like the production of a banyan sprout from a banyan seed, a *kutaja*, conessi sprout from a *kutaja* seed, cannot be explained. And if it is held that the combinations do not follow any order then the bodies of human beings and other animals would change the next moment into that of gods, human beings, or elephants. That is, the body of a particular living being would change the very next moment and there would be utter chaos and there would be no hope in this universe. Therefore, for the sake of all activities to continue in a proper manner, a sentient doer conversant with different activities and their results is totally necessary for the universe to function properly.

Objection: The collection of *pancha-skandhas* or five aggregates produce flash of consciousness and experience and hence it could produce the combination of elements and molecules due to the influence of nescience and the like. Here nescience and other factors could be the agent and so there is no defect in this standpoint.

Reply: No, that argument cannot be accepted as who produces the collection of these *skandhas* or aggregates is not known. Since there is no other example here, so we have to conclude that it is

produced by a sentient being. But if such a sentient doer is accepted then there would be the defect of infinite regress. To remove this defect, if it is held that the collection of these aggregates takes place by the flash of consciousness, then there would be the impossible situation of the flash of consciousness creating itself, which would lead to the defect of interdependence. Hence, that too is untenable. Also, since you do not accept a permanent doer, this standpoint would lead to accepting a permanent doer and would go against your thought.

Further, is the entity experiencing the collection of the aggregates different from the aggregates, or is the same as the aggregates, or one among them? If it is held that the entity is different from the aggregates, then by accepting something other than the aggregates, the standpoint of your thought is defeated and it suffers the same defect as that of the argument of the Vaisheshikas. If it is held that it is the same as the aggregates, the different entities cannot act in unison since if many persons were in one body, it would lead to instability. If it is held that the entity is one of the aggregates, there would be no method to ascertain which of the aggregates would be experiencing and so that stand cannot be accepted.

Objection: It can be held that *alaya-vijnana* or storage-consciousness is both the Atman and the enjoyer as it is self-effulgent. It is also always the substratum of the Atman and the basis of all activities and is also the doer and hence could ascertain which aggregate is the entity.

(To be continued)

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TRADITIONAL TALES

Godly Mother Madalasa

LONG AGO THERE LIVED A KING. He was more than qualified to rule a country. He was also deeply inclined to spirituality. The king performed his duties diligently. In his leisure he performed spiritual austerities in the manner shown by rishis. He increased his spiritual austerities day by day. Constantly contemplating on Brahman, he eventually got the experience of Brahman.

Just as bats automatically come to a tree that has begun to bear fruits, just like honey-bees come to a blossomed flower, many sincere spiritual aspirants came to the king, who was a knower of Brahman. Having dispelled the darkness of ignorance himself, the king guided these aspirants to realise Brahman and to cross the ocean of transmigratory existence of repeated births and deaths. Hearing his words of wisdom these spiritual aspirants took to a life of intense spiritual practices in order to realise Brahman. The king's daughter, princess Madalasa, was one such aspirant.

Following her father and the god-knowing guru, Madalasa lived a life of austerities. Eventually, she too realised Brahman and was constantly established on its contemplation. She was way beyond the mundane lives of name and form that ordinary people lived. She was unaware of the world or her body. She saw Brahman everywhere and in everything. The great Vedantic dictum, 'Brahman alone is true and the universe is false', became an experience for her. She lived a life of complete realisation of Brahman: 'I am not the body, mind, intellect, or ego. The infinite, eternal, self-effulgent Brahman is my true nature.' Meanwhile she was married to Ritadhvaja, the king of the neighbouring country. Madalasa

sought a boon from her husband. She asked that she should be given the freedom to bring up her children in the manner she wished. Ritadhvaja acceded to this request.

Some time passed. Madalasa gave birth to a boy. Ritadhvaja named the boy, Vikranta. Hearing this name, Madalasa laughed. This surprised Ritadhvaja. Madalasa used to remain alone with her child, immersed in the bliss of Brahman. She used to lay the baby boy on her lap and sing to him: 'Let you be stainless!' Always in an indrawn divine state, Madalasa's lullabies were filled with highest Vedantic truths.

The boy crossed infancy. Immersed in complete peace and the bliss of Brahman, Madalasa used to put the boy in a cradle and rock it singing: 'May you be stainless!' The boy was growing. Still his mother was always telling him: 'May you be stainless!' If the boy cried, Madalasa used to say: 'O dear! Why do you cry? Or is it that you have not cried. I am just hearing the cry coming from your body.'

'My son! You are not the body. You do not own the body. And the body does not own you. The body is just like a shirt and it has no other special characteristic. The functions and properties of the body will never affect you. The body may grow or decay but these are not for you, my dear!'

'Mother, father, relatives, friends—all these are temporary. Do not give undue importance to them in your life.'

'Those who try to overcome miseries by enjoying pleasures are complete fools. Being indifferent to misery and happiness, may you be established in the infinite Brahman.'

Thus, Madalasa taught her son about his true nature, the Atman. She clearly taught that Atman alone was his true nature and his true and permanent abode, beyond the body and the mind. She ensured that such noble thoughts were embedded on his tender mind. She was an amazing mother. She was a godly mother. Bless you, Madalasa!

She refrained from telling worldly tales to her son and binding him in the dense darkness of ignorance and from breaking him to smithereens by making him go round and round in the endless cycle of countless births and deaths. Instead, she told him: 'You are stainless! Worldly happenings cannot touch you, my son. You are the Atman. May you be established in the Atman, dear!

'You do not have birth or death. You do not have mother or father. You do not have destruction or change. You are the eternal Atman. You are divine. O dear, may you be established in your divine nature.' Madalasa gave such wealth of Vedantic wisdom to her son. That is indeed true wealth!

Vikranta grew up. With him grew the idea, 'I am the Atman' and it got ingrained in him. Since even as a youth he was convinced that 'Brahman alone is the ultimate reality', he renounced the worldly life full of attachment and affection. Even as a youth, he became a sannyasi and left the palace to go to the forest to perform spiritual austerities. Soon, he experienced Brahman and became a knower of Brahman.

Meanwhile, Madalasa gave birth to another boy. Ritadhvaja named him Subahu. Hearing this name, Madalasa laughed. This time too, Ritadhvaja could not understand the cause of her laughter. Madalasa brought up Subahu just as she did her first child. She put him in a cradle and sang to him Vedantic ideas: 'You are stainless. You are the indestructible Atman. Purity is your true nature.' Always established in Brahman through her words, deeds, and thoughts, she enshrined the same spirit

in the heart of the child. Hence, when Subahu grew up into a young man, he too renounced the world and went to the forest to perform spiritual austerities. Soon, he realised Brahman.

Madalasa gave birth to a third son. Ritadhvaja named him Shatrumardana. Hearing this name, this time too Madalasa laughed. Ritadhvaja could make no sense of his wife's behaviour. Madalasa brought up Shatrumardana just as she had reared her first two sons. She sang to him as lullaby: 'You are stainless. You are the embodiment of Satchidananda.' As Shatrumardana grew up, she taught him about the Atman. He too renounced the worldly life in his youth and went to the forest to perform spiritual austerities. Eventually, he attained the knowledge of Brahman.

Ritadhvaja was a very good king. He was pleased that his wife was highly spiritual. However, her way of bringing up his sons disturbed him. He was sad that none of his three sons had any interest in ruling the country. He was afraid that his lineage would end. He thought: 'I have to coronate my son as the king and give the responsibility of the country to him. After that, I and Madalasa should go to the forest and spend the rest of our lives there doing spiritual austerities.' But, Madalasa's ways were spoiling his plans. He was worried as to who would be his successor to the throne.

Madalasa gave birth to a fourth son. Ritadhvaja remembered that she had laughed when he named his first three sons. So, he told his wife: 'Madalasa, this time you name our son.' She named the fourth son Alarka, which means a mad dog. The king was shocked at this and could not contain himself and asked the queen: 'Madam! Why are you giving such an inappropriate name to the prince?' Madalasa was the embodiment of peace and divinity. She lived as if a goddess had descended on the earth. On being asked thus, she intently looked at her husband

for some time. Then she softly replied in a measured tone: 'O king! Please remember the names you gave to the other sons. Were they not totally inappropriate and not true? You named a son Vikranta. Does not that mean one who moves from one place to the other? Is not the Atman omnipresent? Is there any going to or coming from for the Atman? How can the omnipresent Atman move from one place to the other? Where would it go? Where would it come to?

'You named the second son Subahu. Does it not mean one with strong arms? When Atman has no form, how can it have arms? You named the third son Shatrumardana, which means one who conquers the enemies. Is not the same Atman present everywhere? If that be so, then can there be any enemies or friends for the Atman? Is it ever possible? Hence, the names given by you were also totally inappropriate and untrue. Further, are not children named in this world just for convention? Does the Atman have any name? Since it is the norm of the world to give unsuitable names to children, I named my son Alarka. What is wrong in that?' Madalasa told this in a very soft and clear voice.

Ritadhvaja knew well the greatness of spiritual life and could not refute Madalasa. He admitted: 'Yes, whatever you have said is true.' However, he was discontented and worried: 'Would more sons be born to me?' Hence, he told Madalasa with great sorrow: 'Madam, it is true that I have agreed to your bringing up the children in the manner you want. However, I want only one boon from you. You brought up the first three children in the path of renunciation and so, they have become monks. They have become useless to worldly life and are incapable of ruling a country.

'I pray to you to not teach the path of renunciation to this fourth child. Please allow him to grow into the path of *pravritti* or the world. Make

him learn the duties of a householder and the skills needed for ruling a kingdom.' Madalasa strongly wished to bring up her fourth son also in the path of renunciation by teaching him about the Atman. She realised that her duty was to bring up her son by telling him: 'You are stainless.' But she could not ignore the prayer of the king in a beseeching voice. Overcome with compassion at her husband's state, she agreed to his request.

Madalasa taught the path of the world to Alarka, and not the path of renunciation to realise Brahman. She taught him how to live righteously in the world and also to deftly rule the country much against her usual practice. Accordingly, the prince learned many arts. Madalasa gave Alarka training in many fields. But, she never ceased seeing Atman in everything. She saw her son only as the stainless Atman. She interacted with him and thought about him considering him only as the Atman. She did everything for him with this idea in mind. Alarka grew to be a prince engaged in worldly pursuits. However, Madalasa's seeing him as the Atman was not in vain. Her thoughts penetrated Alarka and gradually made their place in his mind and made him attracted to spirituality. This happened silently and none could notice it, not even the mother and the son.

True to her word, Madalasa taught Alarka only the worldly sciences. Just as the king wished, Alarka became capable of ruling a large kingdom. The king was happy to see that Alarka possessed all qualities necessary for the activities of the world. Ritadhvaja wanted to go to the forest with his wife once Alarka had been coronated as the king. Accordingly the king and the queen prepared to leave their country and go to the forest. The hour of leaving the palace was approaching near. Just before leaving the palace, Madalasa called Alarka and said to him in private: 'A householder may have many attachments. It is natural

that one would have to suffer much because of these attachments. O son, if you ever experience unbearable suffering while performing your worldly duties, remove this ring that I am now putting on your finger and read the small paper scroll that I have hidden in it. That would bring you good.' Saying this, Madalasa blessed her son. Then she went to the forest with her husband.

Determined and hardworking, Alarka became an able ruler. He ruled keeping foremost the welfare of his subjects and justice. His regime went on smoothly and he did not deflect even a bit from the duties of a king. After all, he had been trained by Madalasa! Everyone started showering praises for Alarka's rule.

Some time passed in this manner. Alarka started contemplating on the transitoriness of the world. The joys and victories of the worldly life did not satisfy him. He thought: 'All that is experienced in life is fraught with defects. There is nothing permanent.' When these thoughts became powerful, he was fed up with life itself. King's life turned insipid. He was tormented by an unbearable burden. Then he remembered the parting words of his mother. He was convinced that the time his mother had spoken of, had come. Immediately, he took out from his finger the ring his mother had given and started examining it. The bright light from the ring shone like fire. He felt as if his mother, who had left the palace many years ago, was looking at him with love and affection from the ring. He remembered his mother's face overflowing with love. He opened the ring, took the paper scroll that was inside, and looked at it intently. Yes, there was a surprise waiting for him. '*Tvam asi niranjanah*, you are stainless'—these words were written on the paper scroll.

The moment Alarka saw that, his mind was shaken up by the lightning strike of numerous thoughts like an earthquake, one after the other. What great difference there was between

whatever he had practised all his life and what was written on that tiny piece of paper! Alarka could feel his mind being pulled by a new divine world. His mind became a fountain of an indescribable, immeasurable, holy bliss. He could palpably feel the rising of new thought-waves of incomparable beauty brimming with divine attraction. Since he read the words, 'You are stainless', that idea took a mammoth shape in his mind. Suddenly his mind had a glimpse of the divine nature of the Atman. His mind had then experienced the effulgent nature of the Atman. It was the experience of the effulgent and soothing Atman, Satchidananda.

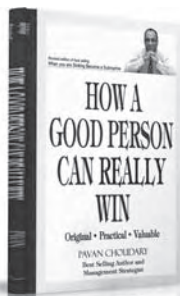
On the birth of Alarka, Madalasa wanted him to attain the experience of the Atman and wanted to give him a suitable upbringing. It was as if that experience was waiting in a cave of Alarka's heart, waiting for him to read the paper scroll. After experiencing the light of the Atman shining in his mind, Alarka became a new man and a new chapter of his life started. The veil of his ignorance was being blown to smithereens. The immaterial and inessential nature of the world became clear to him as a fruit on his palm. He understood the only eternal truth: 'It is the Atman that is the abode of everything and appears as everything.'

Alarka decided to shed his false mask and give up all his attachments. He renounced his petty worldly life in the palace, much like his elder brothers. He went to the forest and performed severe austerities in solitude. After all, he was Madalasa's son! How could his austerity go waste? Alarka understood through experience that he was indeed stainless. He became a knower of Brahman.

Madalasa's life teaches us that if one lives with the thought of Brahman in the mind, one can live an extraordinary spiritual life. If one truly considers one's children as manifestations of Brahman, the children would attain a very high spiritual state. This is shown through Madalasa's life beautifully in the *Markandeya Purana*. ❧

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



How a Good Person Can Really Win

Pavan Choudary

Wisdom Village Publications Pvt Ltd.,
A1-01, The World Spa (East), Sector 30
and 41, Gurgaon, Haryana 122 002.
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₹ 195. ISBN 9789380710457.

This is a book which helps the Naïve—one for whom means are as important as the ends—to battle and win against the Vile—for whom only ends matter, not the path. In a time, when without handling politics, nobody can go up in the ladder, this book has the potential to help those who are confused or have lost their path in black, white, and grey areas of politics and complex power play.

A revised edition of the book published earlier as *When You are Sinking Become a Submarine*, part one of the book covers the mentality, way of manipulation, and actions of the Vile and part two and three explain in detail, different ways for achieving goals effectively by a Naïve.

There are many things that this book can be praised for. Other than the dos and don'ts, lots of stories and historical incidents have been added as well. This helps the readers to understand the concepts easily, remain focussed, and thus makes the learning an enjoyable experience. With every what to do, it also explains why to do, act, or behave in a certain way which is great because nobody wants to follow any advice blindly without understanding the reasons. The remedies or solutions to battle politics by Vile is not a rocket science or something extraordinary that has been mentioned here. These are more of behavioural changes or actions that are needed in the day-to-day life of a Naïve.

There is a small glitch though that could raise doubts in the reader's mind: An incident is mentioned to have happened in the author's life on

page 84—for explaining why one should not be judgemental at first sight—has an uncanny similarity with an incident mentioned by Stephen R Covey in his book (See Stephen R Covey, 'The Power of a Paradigm Shift' in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Franklin Covey, 2004), 13–4).

Lastly, not only Naïve is advised, but Vile has also been given a chance to correct oneself by giving examples of how one's actions can dig one's own grave. By doing so, this book also gains the capacity of entering a person's bookshelf, who might have more similarities with Vile than with Naïve. The Ruler is given practical advice as well. In sum, this book qualifies to be in the bookshelf of anybody working in a corporate, business, or political environment.

Papiya Debnath
Pune



On Evil

Terry Eagleton

Yale University Press, 302 Temple Street, New Haven, CT 06511-8909, USA. Website: www.yalebooks.com. 2010. 192 pp. HB. \$25. ISBN 9780300151060.

Hell is the kingdom of the mad, absurd, monstrous, traumatic, surreal, disgusting and excremental which Jacques Lacan, after the ancient god of havoc, calls Ate. It is a landscape of desolation and despair. But it is a despair that its inhabitants would not wish for a moment to be snatched from them. For it is not only what gives them an edge over credulous idealists of every stripe; it is also the misery that assures them that they still exist. Even this, did they but know it, is a lie, for theologically speaking, as we have seen, there can be no life outside God (78).

Who will believe that Terry Eagleton, the Marxist and atheist, wrote the above? It is Eagleton's erudition which finally makes him 'see into the life of things' (William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*) and write:

Human beings can indeed achieve a degree of self-determination. But they can do so only in the context of a deeper dependence on others of their kind, a dependence which is what makes them human in the first place. It is this, as we shall see, that evil denies. Pure autonomy is a dream of evil. ... In Shakespearian drama, those who claim to depend upon themselves alone, claiming sole authorship of their own being, are almost always villains (12).

This is not very far from the Hindu understanding of karma and divine and demoniac natures as explicated in the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita. The truths of the Gita are so universal that a 'deep reading' (Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1994), 148) of the social sciences and the humanities will perforce reveal what dawned on Eagleton so late in his life—that Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives may be more true than Marx's atheistic rants. Though later Eagleton will reread Marx and assure us that Marx was right as far as the movement of capital is concerned (see his *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale University, 2011) and note the 'was' in the title!), this need to justify Marxism itself proves how Eagleton has changed his earlier rigid atheistic stance (see his *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975)) and has turned theologian: 'The demonic, by contrast, is a cackle of derisive laughter at the very idea that anything human could conceivably have meaning or value' (74).

His comments on demonic possession in *The Exorcist* (1973) itself is an eye-opener on two counts. First, after the passing of Leslie Fiedler and Frank Kermode, in English fiction we have only Eagleton as a literary critic worth reading; and then there is the snooty Harold Bloom. Bloom cannot bear for instance, the works of Stephen King while Fiedler equated King with Cormac McCarthy as early as January 2003. Bloom is contaminated with the agendas of Freud being fixated

or stuck with(in) the Oedipal Conflict (see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University, 1973)) and now churns out guides or crambooks. The point here is that we ought not to take Bloom seriously anymore. Therefore, when Eagleton takes into consideration popular culture for his discussions about theodicy, we should take it as a signal to reframe English literature syllabi globally, and especially in India. Sadly, Indian humanists are notoriously outdated in their range of fiction-reading. This, in spite of what Edward Said once wrote:

There is first of all the slow disappearance of literature itself from the graduate and in some places even the undergraduate curriculum ... In some, perhaps many institutions the broad historical or call it chronological knowledge of literature that used to be expected and required is no longer even available to students, much less taught and emphasized. And for some time now, the very object of former scrutiny, the literary work, has been all but eliminated (see Edward W Said, 'Restoring Intellectual Coherence', *MLA Newsletter* 31 (Spring 1999), 3–4).

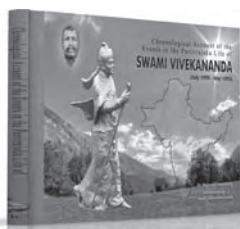
Secondly, Eagleton is willing to at least acknowledge and scrutinise demonic possession and thereby affirm the opposite of the demoniac as will be mentioned at the end of this review. This shows an openness of mind which our current breed of scholars finds unbecoming of their empirical stances. Further, Eagleton's book is worth reading for both the facts of its being a reaffirmation of the literary and of the reality of evil. His first chapter entitled *Fictions of Evil* (19–78) should be made compulsory reading for litterateurs, philosophers, and theologians alike. *On Evil* is the best book available now on the eponymous topic, as well on literature. Eagleton in this book is at his best as a man of letters. Literature can provide insights into theodicy and philosophy which the tortuous texts of established philosophers can never do. Eagleton, the staple of literature students worldwide (see his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982)) cannot be said to not know his Derrida or as quoted above, his Lacan. Yet he sees the problem of evil through an exclusive literary hermeneutic: 'The poet William Blake sometimes

pretends to take the side of the devil, not least in his *Proverbs of Heaven and Hell*. He seizes the conventional opposition between good and evil and mischievously inverts it, making evil the positive category and good the negative one. But this is simply a tactic for scandalising respectable middle-class Christians, with their anemic notion of virtue. Blake's true belief is summarised in a single phrase: "Everything that lives is holy" (125).

Terry Eagleton's book *On Evil* is ironically a commentary on the Holy (see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University, 1917)) and the sovereignty of the good (see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970)).

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor of English,
Ramananda College, Bishnupur



**Chronological Account
of the Events in the
Parivrajaka Life of
Swami Vivekananda
(July 1890–May 1893)**

Dr Shyamali Chowdhury

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. Website: www.sriramakrishna.org. 2015. xx + 226 pp. HB. ₹ 360. ISBN 9789381325650.

Much less is known of the itinerant life of Swami Vivekananda. Such rare men take birth perhaps once in a cycle. All such souls carefully avoid publicity, just in order to protect the purity of their lives from common gaze. And they do not leave any diary of their day-to-day affairs for posterity. They only *live* an authentic, illustrative life. It is that which leaves indelible marks, not only in the minds of the contemporary generation but also on the corridor of time.

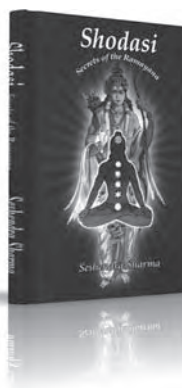
Quite a good number of dedicated souls have been conducting painstaking in-depth researches on the unknown reaches of Swami Vivekananda's itinerant life, both in India and abroad. A few of such stupendous research works have already come out in some monumental volumes like *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, *Swami Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian Newspapers*, *Vivekananda O Samakalin*

Bharatvarsha (Bengali), and *The Master As I Saw Him*. These volumes have thrown much light on the obscure parts of Swamiji's life. But notwithstanding all such attempts a great portion of his life still remains unravelled.

To facilitate such arduous researches on Swamiji's life, Dr Shyamali Chowdhury, the author of the book under review, has dived deep into the unknown recesses of that great life and has struggled to give us many important events less known to the common people in this short and elegantly printed research book. Her research comprises only the short period of Swamiji's life between July 1890 and May 1893, of course with a difference. In the text portion of the book she has carefully arranged the events in chronological order in a tabulated form. Such presentation enables the readers to have a glance at the events which are strewn within only 129 pages of this book. She has collected all her material from 41 books, 6 journals, and 41 websites as we gather from the bibliography. Printed on art paper, the book also provides in an appendix a rare opportunity to view a large number of photographs of contemporary personages associated with Swamiji as also the houses, temples, rivers, and palaces he visited and resided in India during his itinerary. Another important appendix is devoted to furnishing explanatory notes on certain facts and views with the author's own remarks. Undoubtedly this book will provide to all researchers a ready reference for Swamiji's life during the particular itinerant period. The author very much deserves congratulations for this contribution towards the advancement of studies on Swamiji's meaningful and educative life.

Swami Kritarthananda

Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math



**Shodasi:
Secrets of the Ramayana**
Seshendra Sharma

Gunturu Seshendra Sharma Memorial Trust, 32, Janata Flats, Kanthi Sikhara Complex, Panjagutta, Hyderabad 500 082. Email: saatyaki@gmail.com. 2015. 245 pp. PB. ₹ 400. ISBN 9789380710457.

Most of the ancient treatises like the Valmiki Ramayana and Bhagavata lend themselves to allegorical interpretations. The book under review is a scholarly and deeply-researched monograph that formulates the startling theory that the immortal epic Valmiki Ramayana, particularly the *Sundara Kanda*, is nothing but the enunciation of the doctrine of Kundalini Shakti Yoga. The very title of the book is bound to make the scholarly fraternity and even the common readership sit up and take notice.

The radical propositions which the erudite author advances on the basis of relentless logic and a mass of internal and external evidences are: Valmiki Ramayana is rooted in the Vedas, both in terms of the ideas it disseminates and the verbal garb in which those ideas are clothed. Many of the similes that Valmiki employs are inspired by Vedic poetry and literature. Many of the expressions employed in Valmiki Ramayana bear close resemblance to the phraseology found in texts like *Devi Mahatmyam*, *Devi Bhagavatam*, and *Saundarya Lahari*. Sita is none other than the Divine Mother and Gayatri, as borne out by an analysis of the similarity of names and words used in Valmiki Ramayana and Sri-vidya literature. *Sundara Kanda* is nothing but a delineation of Kundalini Yoga. Hanuman's aerial voyage in search of Sita represents allegorically the Devi worshipper's exercise in Kundalini Yoga. Sita is Kundalini Shakti. The episodes of Mainaka, Surasa, and Simhika—representing sattva, rajas, and tamas respectively—represent the piercing of the triple knots by the spiritual aspirant. The Sanskrit phrase '*charana charite pathi*' that occurs in the opening canto of *Sundara Kanda* clearly implies Hanuman's movement through the path of *sushumna*. Lanka is the *muladhara* chakra, the seat of Kundalini, implied in Valmiki's graphic description of Lanka, the place of incarceration of Sita. Lanka is *muladhara* also from the point of view of yoga and it is Sri-chakra from the point of view of spiritual practice. The burning of Lanka symbolises the awakening of *svadhishtana*. The aptness of the name '*Sundara Kanda*' is explicable in the light of various evidences embedded in the epic. Trijata's dream is nothing but the Gayatri Mantra, as can be

inferred from certain Sanskrit terms representing their numerical equivalents, employed to describe the dream-scenes of Trijata and also from the dramatis personae appearing in her dream. Mahabharata is an image of Ramayana and many striking similarities may be found between Valmiki and Vyasa in their style of narrative. Valmiki Ramayana is the seed of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* and Valmiki reincarnates, as it were, as Kalidasa. The Vedic god Indra, as the supreme Deity, dominates the epic as a benchmark for all comparisons with Rama and dwarfs Vishnu, the Puranic God, in importance. Ramayana is anterior to Mahabharata.

There are two annexures at the end of the book titled 'Benedictory Verse of *Saakunthala* is Eulogy of Devi' and 'All Humans Have the Same Destination'.

Coming from the pen of a Telugu poet proficient in several languages, who was active in varied disciplines ranging from Sanskrit studies to cultural activism and who was given the Sahitya Akademi Award, this book is definitely of exceptional merit as the ingenious interpretations of various verses of the epic and also of allied hymnal literature to establish the novel but plausible propositions, come as refreshing revelations. The book unmistakably bears the imprints of an amazingly analytical, deeply erudite, and marvellously nimble mind that effortlessly plumbs the depths of the oceanic epic and picks up and presents to the community of discerning readers pearls of insightful ideas and truths.

One glaring drawback of this essentially Sanskrit-oriented book is the absence of Sanskrit quotations in Devanagari script as transliterations in Roman script that are given are a poor substitute for the sonorous Sanskrit words clothed in the Devanagari script.

The merits mentioned in a short review of this book packed with quaint and profound ideas constitute merely the proverbial tip of an iceberg. A fund of fruitful and lofty ideas awaits those who venture to dive deep into this great book. In short, the book is a riveting read for scholars and a strong stimulant for the general readers.

N Hariharan
Madurai

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Conversations on Consciousness

Susan Blackmore

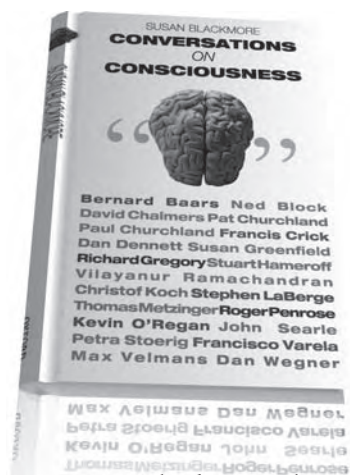
Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. 2006. vii + 274 pp. £ 10.99. PB. ISBN 9780192806239.

ONE THING THAT ALMOST everybody agrees on is that classical dualism does not work; mind and body—brain and consciousness—cannot be two different substances. As Dan Dennett puts it ‘there’s no mystery stuff; dualism is hopeless.’ Yet dualities of various kinds keep popping up all over the place, in spite of people’s best efforts to avoid them. So I tried to wrinkle these out wherever I found them. Even saying ‘give rise to’ or ‘generate’ may imply that consciousness is something that is created by brain activity and therefore separate from it, which is why I challenged Susan Greenfield saying that ‘the brain *generates* consciousness’ and Richard Gregory that it ‘generates sensations’; and presumably this is why Ned Block and Kevin refused to use the word ‘generate’. I shall leave you to decide whether Susan really does avoid dualism by her temporary switch to ‘correlations’, whether Max Velmans succeeds with his reflexive monism or Vilayanur Ramachandran with his neutral monism, and whether Francisco’s radical formulation really does escape the problem altogether. I cannot entirely decide for myself.

I am also unsure about the popular move from brains ‘causing’ or ‘generating’ consciousness to correlating with it; a move made not only by Susan but by Francis and Christof as

well. In fact many people discuss the neural correlates of consciousness (NCCs)—meaning whatever is going on in a person’s brain when they are having a conscious experience. This move sometimes appears to be the sensible and cautious strategy of considering correlations before going on to work out the underlying relationship, but sometimes it appears to be nothing more than a verbal trick designed to evade philosophical trouble. The lurking dualism can be sensed when people talk about NCCs as though the neural events are one kind of thing and the conscious experience is something completely different, and then imply that by moving from correlations to causes we can bridge the unbridgeable gap. Paul rejects both correlations and causality by insisting that experience just is a pattern of neural activation. And Kevin replaces it with the radical idea that experiences are not correlated with anything going on in the brain; rather they are what brains do.

Similar trouble can lurk in discussions of the difference between conscious and unconscious brain processes. For example, in answer to the first question, Bernie Baars asks what is the difference between knowledge that is conscious and knowledge that is unconscious, and answers in terms of Global Workspace Theory;



Roger compares things that are conscious with things that are not; Ned compares information that is phenomenal with that which is not; and Christof compares neurons that give rise to consciousness with those that do not.

This distinction makes me very uneasy, and in these conversations I tried to explore why. A natural way of thinking about it seems to be something like this—we know that most of what goes on in the brain is unconscious; for example I am not aware of the way my visual cortex detects edges and corners or constructs 3-D shapes from the 2-D input; I am only aware of the tree I see outside my window: I am not aware of how my brain constructs grammatical sentences but only of the ideas I am trying to express and the words that come out of my mouth. So there must be an underlying difference in the brain between the conscious and unconscious processes.

But what could this mean? It might mean that although all brain activity is involved, there is some reason why we end up reporting experiences of trees and ideas, not neurons. Yet more often it is taken to mean that some brain cells or brain areas or types of neural activity or kinds of processing are the ones that create or give rise to or generate conscious experiences while the rest are not. This magic difference then throws us right back into the hard problem; for if we accept this difference we not only have to explain what it means for a physical brain to generate or produce consciousness, but why only some of its activity does so.

Finally I cannot leave this first question without mentioning the thorny topic of qualia. A quale is usually defined as the subjective quality of a sensory experience, such as the redness or sweet scent of a rose, or the rasping sound of a saw on wood. It is not the physical attributes of these things but the intrinsic property of the

experience itself, and is private and ineffable. This philosophical concept has caused enormous trouble, and did so here. Many people mentioned qualia; indeed Francis, Rama, and Petra Stoerig began with them, then Dan Dennett denied their existence and Paul and Pat defended them, making things extremely confusing. It might help to say that if you take the definition of qualia very strictly then you have more or less committed yourself to the idea that experiences are intrinsically different from the physical world, and the hard problem is really hard. However, many people use the term much more loosely as a synonym for ‘experience’ and don’t imply such a commitment. Watching out for this difference may help to avoid confusion.

All these interrelated issues can be summed up by asking where people stand on the following question—is consciousness something extra; is it something separate from the brain processes it depends on, or not? In a sense this is the central question that distinguishes the great theories of consciousness from each other. It has led to fierce arguments in the literature, and is important for many reasons. One reason is that, as neuroscience progresses and we learn more and more about the brain, we are gradually coming to understand such functions as vision, learning, memory, thinking, and emotions. So, when that understanding is complete, will there still be something left out—consciousness—that we haven’t yet explained? Roger thinks so. So does Dave. He argues that when we have solved all the easy problems, there will still remain the hard problem of consciousness—a conclusion that is hotly denied by the Churchlands, Dan Dennett, and Francis. Dan has famously amassed what he calls ‘the A team’ to fight off Dave’s ‘B team’ taunts of ‘you’ve left something out’.



REPORTS

News of Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia started the first phase of its year-long centenary celebration from 24 to 27 December 2015. Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the programme comprising public meetings, release of the commemorative volume, a procession, a photo exhibition, and cultural events. Swami Shivamayananda and Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, besides about 350 monks, 500 former students, and 2,500 devotees, attended the programme.

A student of the high school run by **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar** won an award in the national-level essay competition conducted last year by Tata Building India, New Delhi, comprising a certificate, a camera, and a laptop, handed over to him in a function held at Delhi on 4 December.

Three students of the boys' and girls' higher secondary schools of **Ramakrishna Mission, Chengalpattu** excelled in a national-level recitation competition on *Thirukkural*—a Tamil classic composed by Thiruvalluvar—and participated in the 'Thirukkural in Parliament' event at the Parliament House, New Delhi on 17 December. Each of them was awarded a memento, a medal, and a certificate; the schools were also given mementos. The competition was organised by *Students and Youth for Thiruvalluvar*.

A visually challenged student of Swami Shivananda higher secondary school of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** secured the National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities for 2015 from the Ministry



Meeting of Hindu Monks at Thrissur

of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, for his outstanding performance as a creative child with disabilities. Sri Arun Jaitley, Union Finance Minister, presented the award comprising a certificate, a medal, and a cash prize of fifty thousand rupees on 3 December, International Disability Day.

Swami Suhitananda, inaugurated the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar** on 9 December.

Students of the Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakalpa unit being run by **Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Educational and Cultural Centre, Darjeeling** won 2 gold medals, 2 silver medals, and 11 bronze medals in different categories in the District Taekwondo—a Korean martial art—Championship held by Darjeeling Police on 12 and 13 December.

The extension to the dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kozhikode** was inaugurated on 25th December.

Sri Ram Naik, governor of Uttar Pradesh, inaugurated the two-day National Symposium of Acupuncture Association of India at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow** on 5 December.

Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, consecrated the renovated temple, with new portraits of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip** on 7 December.

Sri Vajubhai Rudabhai Vala, governor of Karnataka, visited **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysuru** on 26 December.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem conducted two values education programmes at two colleges in Salem district from 17 to 22 December. In all, 555 students attended the programmes.

The refurbished 20-bed non-cardiac ICU at **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata** was inaugurated on 20 November.

As a part of the year-long programme to mark the centenary of *Prabuddhakeralam*, the Malayalam monthly brought out by **Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur** a meeting of monks was held on 12 December. About 35 monks belonging to different Hindu monastic orders attended it.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the dining-hall at **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Comilla** (Bangladesh) centre on 6 December.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prasara Samsad in a function held at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka** on 4 December. The Samsad will function in Bangladesh on the same lines as the Bhava Prachar Parishad in India.

Relief

Flood Relief · West Bengal: Two of our centres in West Bengal conducted the following relief operations among the flood-affected people in the state: (a) **Naora** centre distributed 200 garments, including 100 jackets, among 200 people of 4 villages in South 24 Parganas district on 4 December. (b) **Tamluk** centre distributed 300 saris and 200 dhotis among 250 families of 12 villages in Purba Medinipur district on 22 November.

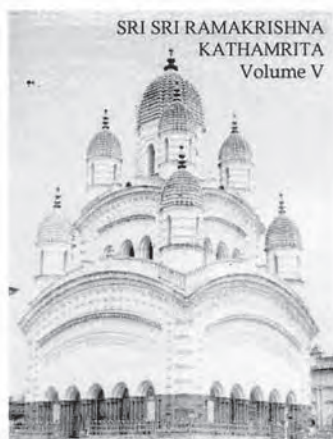
Winter Relief · 9,839 blankets, 380 jackets, 1,047 sweaters, and 25 wrappers were distributed to poor people through the following centres: **Agartala:** 300 blankets from 22 to 25 November; **Bamunmura:** 323 blankets on 22 November and 24 December; **Bhopal:** 200 blankets on 8 and 9 December; **Bhubaneswar:** 159 blankets from 13 to 25 December; **Chapra:** 1,000 blankets from 25 November to 25 December; **Contai:** 250 blankets

and 100 jackets from 8 to 12 December; **Delhi:** 300 blankets on 19 December; **Gadadhar Ashrama:** 348 blankets from October to December; **Indore:** 400 blankets on 13 December; **Jalpaiguri:** 300 blankets from 22 to 29 November; **Jammu:** 250 blankets from 1 November to 25 December; **Kamarpukur:** 1,900 blankets in December; **Khetri:** 200 blankets and 791 sweaters in December; **Kothar:** 60 jackets on 5 December; **Limbdi:** 200 blankets in December; **Malda:** 860 blankets in November and December; **Manasadwip:** 300 blankets from 22 to 30 November; **Mekhliganj:** 200 blankets from 5 to 21 December; **Naora:** 75 blankets and 100 jackets from October to 15 December; **Narottam Nagar:** 500 blankets and 176 sweaters from 4 to 25 December; **Puri Mission:** 300 blankets from 24 November to 15 December; **Ranchi Morabadi:** 354 blankets from 9 September to 3 December; **Shimla:** 220 blankets and 120 jackets from 6 to 14 December; **Sikra Kulingram:** 300 blankets, 80 sweaters, and 25 Wrappers from 2 November to 22 December; **Silchar:** 300 blankets from 10 November to 6 December; **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 300 blankets on 14 December.

Earthquake Relief · Nepal: Continuing its relief work among the families affected by the devastating earthquake that had struck Nepal in April, Kathmandu centre distributed 2,480 foam mattresses and 800 polythene sheets among 1,240 families in Shankarapur Municipality area in Kathmandu district from 23 to 27 December.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Contai:** 300 saris and 200 dhotis from 8 to 12 December. (b) **Gadadhar Ashrama:** 246 saris, 200 dhotis, and 80 assorted garments from September to December. (c) **Jalpaiguri:** 300 saris and 200 dhotis from 4 October to 29 November. (d) **Kothar:** 300 saris, 300 dhotis, 200 chaddars, and 200 assorted garments on 5 December. (e) **Narottam Nagar:** 176 tubes of toothpaste, 176 vials of hair oil, 176 bars of bathing soap, 880 sachets of shampoo, and 176 pens among 176 school children in December. (f) **Ranchi Morabadi:** 19 globes, 9 carpets, 7 wall clocks, and 19 footballs in December. (g) **Sarisha:** 869 saris and 196 dhotis from 12 to 18 October.





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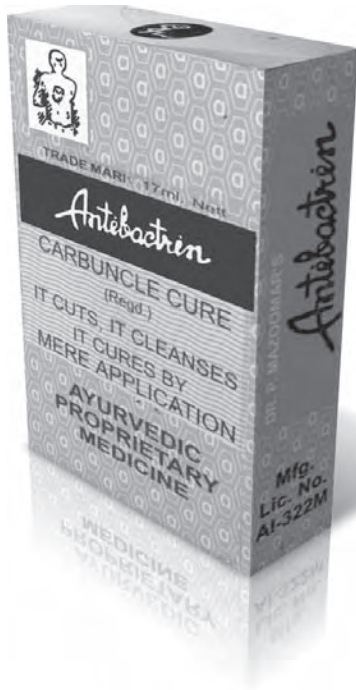


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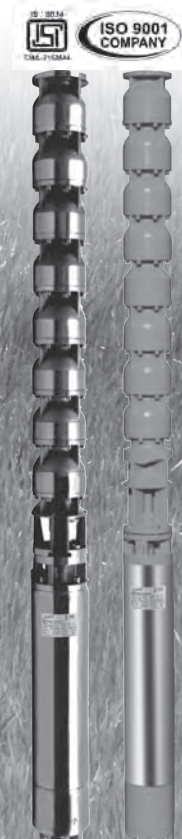
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"Certain men are born in certain periods to perform certain actions in combination. Ajit Singh and myself are two such souls — born to help each other in a big work for the good of mankind. We are as supplement and complement."

— Swami Vivekananda.

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When complete, Fatteh Billass will also have a magnificent museum, bringing to fore the glorious chapter of history that records the unique king - monk relationship and its influence.

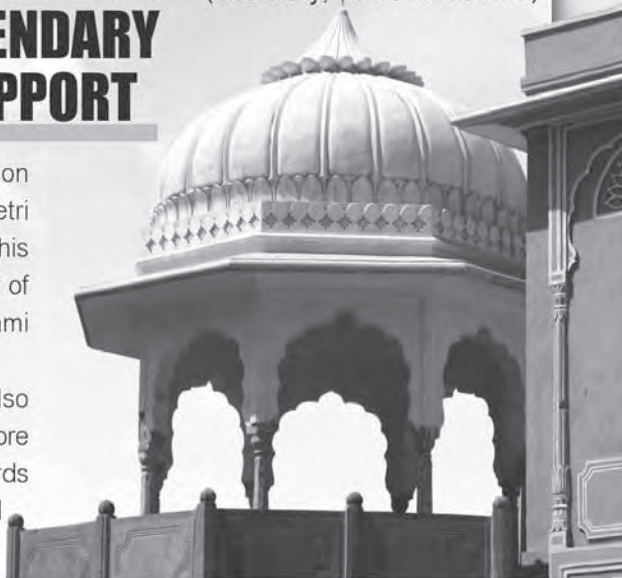
While the restoration process of the 'Fatteh Billass' has been continuing since 2011, with the available fund we could so far complete 80% of the project.



REVIVING A LEGEND CALLS FOR A LEGENDARY SUPPORT

We require another rupees one crore to complete the remaining 20 % of this project. While we accept any amount however small, public acknowledgments of contributions above Rs. 10 lakh will be displayed at the site. Donations are exempt from Income Tax, under section 80 G of the IT Act, 1961. With prayers for your well-being.

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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda



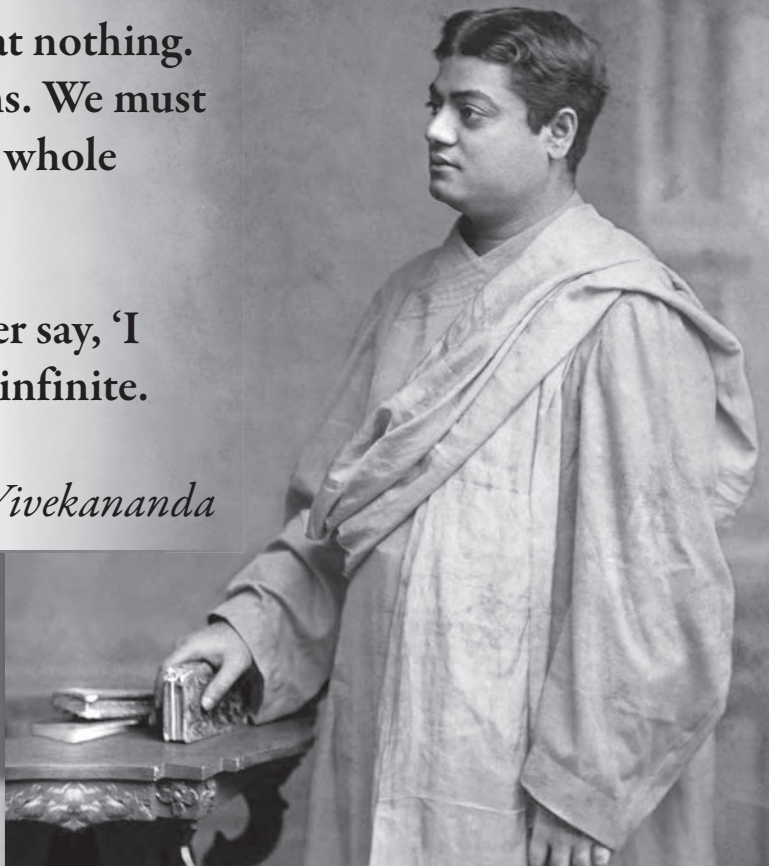
Each soul is potentially divine.
The goal is to manifest this
Divinity within.

Strength is life, weakness is
death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.
You will be like lions. We must
rouse India and the whole
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I
cannot', for you are infinite.

—*Swami Vivekananda*



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